

THE UK'S BIGGEST REGIONAL GAY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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ZONE

APRIL 2018 ISSUE 252

CERI DUPREE

brings new show to the Midlands

READERS' AWARDS 2018

Your winners revealed!



*First artists
announced!*

BETH DITTO

*The Gossip
star headlines
Birmingham Pride!*



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GADGETS
WHAT'S ON
COMPETITIONS**



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Pride headliner excited to be performing for Midlands audiences



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putting on a show that's just Faaaabulous at Birmingham Hippodrome

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A photograph of two shirtless men in a shower. The man in the foreground is leaning against a wall, smiling broadly with his eyes closed. The man behind him is also smiling and looking towards the camera. They are both wet, and a white towel is draped over the man in the foreground.

*"Heart-breaking, raw and emotional,
this really is not one to miss"*

★★★★★ Broadway Baby

*"Laugh-out-loud lines...
a touching romance"*

★★★★★ The Independent

From the co-writer of the
award winning *Away From Home*

**Can two men
raised to fight
ever learn to love?**

gypsy queen

By Rob Ward

A Hope Theatre Company
production

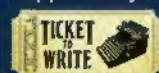
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Same-sex 'Strictly' coming to Coventry

Dancing Feet Coventry, in partnership with the city's gay venue, The Yard, have announced that they are to host a brand new venture called Coventry Does Strictly-LGBT on Saturday 3 November.

The event will be the first same-sex dance competition to be held outside London. The chosen charities for Coventry Does Strictly-LGBT will be PRISM and CW Friend, both of which are local organisations that work within the Coventry & Warwickshire LGBT community. Dancing Feet are currently recruiting 10 contestants to take part. The contestants will be paired with a Dancing Feet dancer, and over eight weeks will learn a waltz and cha cha cha. They will then compete against one another for the Coventry Does Strictly-LGBT trophy.

If you're interested in taking part, contact jefferiesmark1@sky.com for a registration form and further information.



Have ya heard?



Birmingham Pride announces HSBC UK as lead sponsor

Birmingham Pride has announced that HSBC UK will return as lead sponsor of the festival for 2018. The event is expected to attract more than 75,000 people. It will be the second year running that HSBC UK has been the festival's lead sponsor.

Birmingham Pride is the UK's largest two-day LGBT festival and has taken place for more than 20 years. In the last five years, it has raised more than £300,000 for local community groups.

HSBC UK, which is developing its new UK headquarters in Centenary Square, Birmingham, will be the headline sponsor for the main stage, which sits at the heart of the community-focused festival. It will also lead out the annual parade, with 200 employees and their friends and families in attendance. Lawrence Barton, Birmingham Pride Festival Director, said: "We're really looking forward to working with the HSBC UK team again for this year's Birmingham Pride on its 21st birthday. We'd like to thank HSBC UK for their continued support, which helps great social projects and causes across the city. Over the last five years, the festival has raised more than £300,000 for local community groups and LGBT charities and projects. HSBC UK has been particularly proactive in making our working relationship a year-round partnership, as well as their significant involvement during the course of the festival week." Birmingham Pride takes place in the heart of the city's gay village on Saturday 26 and Sunday 27 May, and this year takes the theme Be You. Tickets are available from birminghampride.com

My Dad Wrote A Porno heads to the Midlands

The team behind My Dad Wrote A Porno are next month bringing a live version of the smash-hit podcast to Warwick Arts Centre in Coventry. The cult show, which boasts nearly 100 million downloads, sees Jamie Morton

and his best pals, James Cooper and Radio One DJ Alice Levine, read a 'lost chapter' from Jamie's dad's 'dirty book'.

My Dad Wrote A Porno: Live visits the arts centre on Saturday 19 May.



Gay male couples **least likely to get divorced**



Married gay male couples are least likely to break up and get divorced, new research shows.

Researchers have found same-sex male couples are twice as likely as lesbians to stay together. Women in same-sex relationships are 1.8 times as likely as heterosexual couples to go their separate ways.

The study followed 515 couples in Vermont in the US. It found longer relationship length, older age and better relationship quality reduced the chances of a breakup.

"Other studies on heterosexual couples have found women have higher standards for relationship quality than men," said study author Esther Rothblum, a professor of women's studies at San Diego State University. "We suspect that similar dynamics may be at play with the lesbian couples in our study, leading to the higher dissolution rate. At the same time, we found that older couples were less likely to break up, and having children had no impact on the breakup rates."

The study looked at the couples over a period of 12 years.

Warwickshire Pride fundraisers subjected to three hours of homophobic abuse

Fundraisers for Warwickshire Pride were subjected to over 100 incidents of homophobic abuse during the course of three hours at Stratford-upon-Avon market last month.

Pride had set up a stall at the market on Saturday 10 March to promote the charity and fundraise for the festival.

Commenting on what happened, Warwickshire Pride Chair Daniel Browne told the Coventry Telegraph: "The first person who approached the stall shouted at our volunteer and told him that an LGBT+ stall had no place in Stratford. From then on, over 100 people walked past the stall or approached it and either tutted, gave looks of disgust or made comments such as 'that's disgusting', 'I don't wanna see that', and 'for f***'s sake, look at that'. One person also approached the stall to say that he has nothing against LGBT+ people because it's an illness that people can't help catching."

"The number of incidents was counted initially but the counting stopped when the total reached 100. The incidents took place from approximately 9am until around 12pm, at which time our volunteers decided to pack up the stall and leave Stratford."

Warwickshire Pride filed a report with Warwickshire Police, who have said that dealing with hate crimes is a high priority for the force.



Fame announced as part of new season at Brum theatre



Birmingham's New Alexandra Theatre has unveiled details of its 2018 line-up of shows.

Fame, Motown The Musical and Saturday Night Fever are just three of the hit productions visiting the venue over the coming year. Also featuring on the programme is

Rock Of Ages, a festive run of Benidorm Live, the much-loved classic Dirty Dancing and a brand new production of Madagascar - A Musical Adventure.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit atgtickets.com/Birmingham or call 0844 871 3011.

New Coventry gay venue to open

A new gay venue is set to open in Coventry, and has announced a huge line-up of cabaret across the Easter Bank Holiday weekend.

The Kiki Lounge & Loft is the city's newest LGBT venue. Described as 'stylish, funky, exciting and diverse', the bar & cabaret club is being launched just a month after Glamorous opened its doors in Coventry.

The launch weekend is set to feature Sum Ting Wong and Miss Penny on Friday 30 March, Danny Beard on Saturday the 31st and a triple bill consisting of La Voix, Pink tribute Vicky Jackson and Miss Fannie Coil. The two-floor venue will regularly feature live entertainment and DJs, and is located on Earlsdon High Street, Coventry, CV5 6ET.



Have ya heard?

Birmingham Pride 2018
the line-up just gets better
and better...



With Birmingham Pride fast approaching, excitement is building as more and more big names are added to this year's line-up.

Latest additions include drum and bass chart toppers Rudimental, X Factor's youngest winner Louisa Johnson, and former Scissor Sisters frontman Jake Shears - check out our interview with Jake on page 10.

Other highlights include Gossip's Beth Ditto, 80s popstar Howard Jones and 90s pop sensation Louise. We reckon that's more than enough reasons to bag yourself a ticket to this year's Birmingham Pride. Don't you?

Check out the full line-up on page 14.

Going it alone for Sex In The City



A one-woman show visiting the Midlands next month will pay tribute to the hit US TV series **Sex And The City**.

Kerry Ipema will take on the role of all four of the series' leading characters when she visits Solihull's Core Theatre, the Artrix in Bromsgrove and Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn on 9, 10 and 11 May respectively.

"I hope to create an environment that's very similar to the girls' brunches," says Kerry. "There's a lot of drinking, there's a lot of fun, there's a lot of laughter, and I like to source a lot of material from each audience, so each show is different."

Check out each venue's website for further details.

Local Life Story

Name: Ginny Lemon

Occupation: Drag Queen

Place of birth: Worcester

Star sign: Aquarius

Age: 17 (ex VAT)

About Ginny

Where did you grow up?

On the sordid streets of Droitwich Spa.

Single or attached?

Attached to Mr Lemon.

What makes you happy?

Friends, music and marijuana.

What makes you sad?

Paying for prescriptions.

What makes you angry?

Social media and the ridiculous outrage and bullshit people post. Whatever happened to cat videos?

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

My profile! I haven't got a neck! It's pure fat from chin to chest.

What's been the most embarrassing thing you've done in your life?

I slipped and cracked my rib whilst singing Babooshka during my Tuesday residency at The Village Inn.

Would you consider getting married in the future?

Absolutely - although I've never needed the hetero title of 'marriage'.

Coming Out

When did you first know you were gay?

I was hiding from a teacher with another boy when I was 10. We hid under a desk and, for some reason, I lay on my back with my legs in the air with another boy on top of me. I knew then that I felt very comfortable in that position.

When did you come out?

I was outed aged 14 by a father who opened my post by accident! It was porn!

What was school like for you as a gay teenager?

Horrific! Luckily I was able to fight back and use my queerness as my protection.

Who was the first person you told you were gay?

A girl called Milly. We were both sat on the floor, and someone thought we were homeless so threw us some spare change at the very moment I told her.

What would you say to a youngster trying to come to terms with their own sexuality?

Your queerness is what makes



you amazing. One day you'll meet your own tribe of people who're just as weird and wonderful as you, and then you'll realise how sad and desperate those people who said mean things are. You'll be the one laughing, but with joy not bitterness.

Have you ever had any experiences with the opposite sex?

By experiences, do you mean sex? Well, babes, I like to try the whole menu before I settle on my favourite dish.

Your Career

What and/or who inspires your look?

Visually I'm inspired by Victoria Wood, Su Pollard, Mrs Overall and Joan Crawford but when Christina Darling started hitting back. Most of my wardrobe is vintage, darling!

Quickfire

Who's your favourite actor?

Elizabeth Taylor.

What's your favourite book?

Hearts And Showers by Su Pollard.

Half empty or half full?

Split.

What's your favourite food?

Eggs.

And how about your favourite drink?

Gin.

Madonna or Lady Gaga?

How is this even a question? BOW DOWN TO YOUR QUEEN M.

If you could take a selfie with one person, alive or dead, who would it be?

Kate Bush.

How would you describe your music?

Essentially I'm a storyteller. I mostly use vocal loops to create unusual rhythmic vocal beats, then add ridiculous lyrics to engage the listener. Kinda like a mix of Bjork and Enya but on acid.

What are your beauty secrets?

With the amount of gin I've drunk, I'm practically embalmed in it! You can't go wrong with some Aloe Vera and glitter spray.

What's your advice for anyone who wants to do drag?

Don't do it! I need the gigs and the money!

What was the X Factor like?

Let me just say this - they asked me! They changed my backing track and autotuned me! I am indeed a bitter lemon, but to be honest, I had a right laugh and met some wonderful people (and some arseholes too), but the judges were actually lovely and friendly. It's all in the editing, dear!

Where do you see your career going?

Down the toilet? No, seriously, I would love my own TV show, but who wouldn't? At the moment, I've got my fingers in a lot of pies, and I'm just about to start work on my fifth original album, called Tubes. Available online soon (wink wink).

Gay Scene

How long have you been frequenting the Midlands gay scene?

About two years. I was practically a recluse before.

What's been your fondest memory of the scene?

Nights like Secondself and

Glittershit, as you get to see so many wonderful performers and meet very talented and interesting people.

Who's your favourite cabaret act on the scene?

This is tough because Birmingham has such an incredible mix of artists. I have to pick two - Twiggy, because she's an absolute fucking icon, and Auntie Jamie, because her performances blow my mind and make me wet my knickers every time.

Who's your favourite person on the scene?

Yshee Black, of course.

What do you most enjoy about the scene?

Everything from the danger dykes to the squealing queens, I think it's all fabulous!

What have you noticed about the way the scene's changed over the years?

I feel the community is actually becoming friendlier in these extreme political times. I feel the Birmingham community is coming together with open arms and even more open minds.

How would you change the scene?

I would love to see a non-alcohol-based venue, like a coffee shop or a bookshop; somewhere where people of all ages and backgrounds can get together without the stench of vodka and yet another dismal Katy Perry song making our ears bleed.

Time Out

Where do you like to go on a night out?

A sordid house party.



What do you do to relax?

Valium.

What do you enjoy on telly?

Bad Girls - the best TV show ever.

What was the last track or album you bought or downloaded?

Y Kant Tori Read, the lost 1980s Tori Amos album. It changed my life.

Which one website do you spend the most time on?

Xtube.

What type of holiday do you prefer?

Amsterdam, for the obvious reasons.



JAKE SHEARS

excited to be performing at Birmingham Pride...

Best known as lead singer of millennium pop group Scissor Sisters, Jake Shears is now going it alone. A headliner at next month's Birmingham Pride, Jake recently took time out of his busy schedule to talk to Midlands Zone about collaborations, making his Broadway debut, writing his memoir and why he's so excited to be performing songs from his new album in front of Midlands audiences...

What does it mean to you to be performing as one of the headliners at this year's Birmingham Pride, Jake?

For me to be able to perform at Pride with a full band is really exciting, as it's something I don't get to do very often. The majority of Pride events aren't equipped to hold a whole band - they're usually PA gigs, which means people perform with just a mic to a pre-recorded track. This is one of the first Prides at which I've played. I've done City Mardi Gras, but that was DJing, and I did a performance with Courtney Act, but it was more of a dance performance. What's also exciting is I'll be performing my new stuff. So far I've just done one concert in London with this material, so I'm looking forward to playing new music to people who haven't heard it. And I love Pride season - it's a blast! I'm honoured to be able to do it in Birmingham - it's going to be a lot of fun.

What can audiences expect from your solo performance?

You know, I just do my thing. I'm still finding my footing with this new stuff and with being a solo performer. The gigs I've done so far have been an absolute blast; it's been so much fun. At first I was kind of nervous. The first couple of times I performed, I was like, "Wow, this is so weird, to do this without Scissors - like, where's Ana?", but I got the hang of it real quick, and I think people are going to be very entertained.

On a scale of one to 10, how flamboyant will your performance be?

Oh, a 10. I'm excited to dress up again - it's been a while since I've donned the sequins.

Who are you most looking forward to seeing at Birmingham Pride?

Beth Ditto is going to be there too, isn't she? That's going to be fucking awesome. It's always been my dream to do something with her. We got to play with Beth once at a Lovebox Festival; I love her so much. I think she and I would make a great pair, playing back to back. I've always wanted to go on tour with her - a co-headline with me and Beth Ditto would be a fucking sicko tour.

What do you enjoy most about performing in the UK?

It's awesome to play the UK. We have a

history, and it feels like UK audiences have been with me (The Scissors) since the beginning. I'm hoping me being back will conjure up a lot of good memories for people, and that makes me happy in a very specific way.

Who would you cite as your all-time biggest musical influence?

I would have to say Bowie, just because I started to listen to him at such a young age. My first fantasy about performing came about while listening to his music. He's still my main inspiration, and I always go back to him. My number two would have to be Paul Williams - he's a songwriter who did the Bugsy Malone movie. His musical style has always been a massive influence on what I do.

Of all the artists you've collaborated with - either in a performing or writing capacity - who's been the most memorable?

There are so many. I think getting to write with Bryan Ferry and then going to London and recording with Roxy Music was massive. I am a huge Roxy Music fan and a huge fan of Bryan Ferry's, so to get to watch his process, and to watch the band's process, was something I will never forget. I've had lots of experiences of great collaborations, but that was one where I was like, "How did this even happen?"

At what age did you realise your future lay in performing?

I was 22, and it was around the time that the Scissors were a three-piece. Comfortably Numb had been released and was getting plenty of airplay. I was at Sonar in Barcelona, and one of my favourite DJs, Tiga, played one of the songs from the single. I remember that night having this full sensation of knowing this was going to be my life - this was the path I was on, one I was excited to be on. Before then, I was just kind of throwing things at a wall. There was a time when I thought I was going to be a horror novelist, and it wasn't until we put out our first music that I realised there was a lot of potential in what we were doing.

You recently made your Broadway debut as Charlie Price in the acclaimed musical Kinky Boots. How did that come about, and what new skills have you had to learn for the role?

They called me up and asked if I was

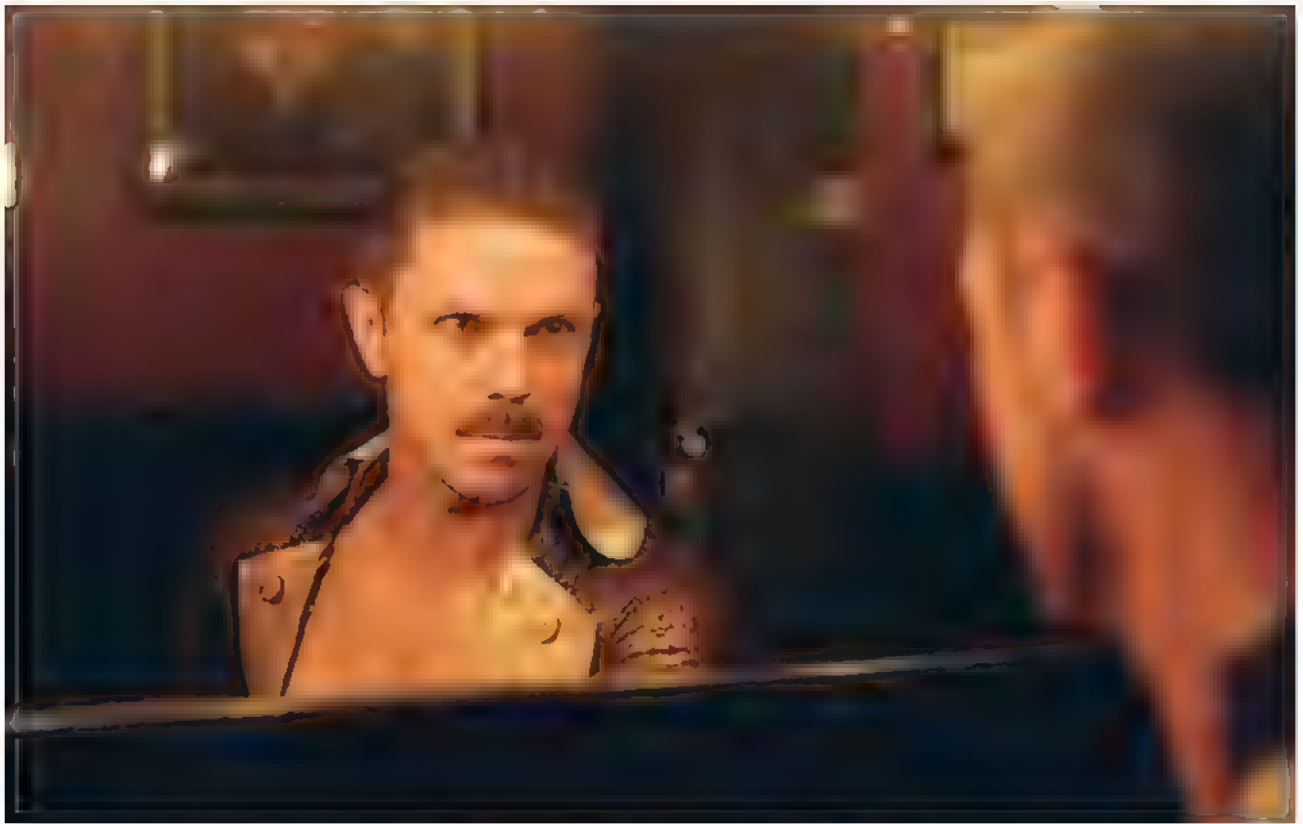
interested - and of course I was. I was also really scared because I've not really done anything like it before. I did a play a couple of years ago in Los Angeles, but I'm not an actor. Well, I wasn't an actor; I am now. The thought of it all was so frightening but at the same time exciting. I like to put myself in situations that make me a little bit uncomfortable, and I like to be in a little bit over my head, as I was when we began rehearsals. There were moments where I was like, I don't know if I'm going to be able to do this. I wasn't quite sure if it was within my capabilities. It's turned out to be one of the joys of my life. I've now been doing the show for three months, and it's something I will never forget. It's given me a new kind of confidence, and I've learned so much from all the people around me. I've realised that not only can I do this but I actually love doing it. The process has given me a lot of insight into musical writing. I've written a couple of scores. I love writing musicals, and this is something I now want to continue doing. I've learned a lot from being on the other side, and being inside a great musical. It's been an amazing experience, and I'm going to be really sad without it in my life, for a while at least...

Prior to Kinky Boots, we'd not heard from you in a while. What had you been up to?

For a couple of years, I was just searching around. I wrote a book, which is soon to be released in the UK, and my album is done and mastered - in the can, as they say. I recorded it in New Orleans, in Kentucky, and I reckon it's one of the best things I've ever made. I wanted to hide away and get some really good work done. I didn't want to re-emerge until I had some really good stuff to show for it. I am really, really proud of all of the stuff I've gotten done in the last couple of years. I've worked really, really hard on it. I'm so excited, and it's surreal to now be sharing it with the world. I think this album is going to blow people away. I'm hoping people are really going to love it.

Your memoir, Boys Keep Swinging, is a candid account of fame, success, music, sex and sexuality. What was the most challenging aspect when writing this?

Just getting through the hard parts and doing some form of self-examination whilst I was writing it. Also, the realisation of the memories which are lost. There's so much I



remember and so much that I don't, and that's a kind of sad feeling. The hardest part was that first draft - just spitting it out. You know it's garbage and you have to keep writing it, even though you know it's just a mess. That was definitely the hardest part. Once I'd finished a big chunk, say 350 pages, I could go back to the beginning and then really start writing it. That was a lot more fun

You came out to your parents at the age of 15. Reflecting on that time, what advice would your 39-year-old self offer to a 15-year-old Jake Shears?

I probably would've waited. I came out at school before I came out to my parents, and if I'd known the sort of heat I would get, I probably would've waited a couple of years. When young people come to me and ask for coming-out advice, I kind of grill them a little bit on where they're living, what their parents are like, what their school environment is like. I often tell kids to sit on it for a second because I think not every environment is a perfect one to come out in. Coming out at school when I was 15 was not the most brilliant of ideas, I have to say. So I would've told myself to wait a minute. But I did it, and it kind of shaped who I am now, so I don't regret it.

Next year marks the 20th anniversary of your arrival in New York. Tell us about your first impressions of the Big Apple?

It was so overwhelming. I couldn't sleep at

night because I was just so excited. It seemed there was just so much possibility, and it was just fun. There was so much to do. You could get by without a lot of money - there were cute little pizza places where you could hang out and spend a whole evening drinking wine without breaking the bank. There were so many amazing people around. Downtown was pretty vibrant, and it was interesting because when I got here, Rudy Giuliani was mayor and everybody was grousing about how he was cleaning up the city. They were all talking about 'how the city was over', but I didn't think that was necessarily the case. The city is so different now. Manhattan itself has become so commercialised, and it's prohibitive to live here for a lot of people. Everything is very expensive, and so a lot of stuff has moved over to Brooklyn - a lot of the nightlife at least. I haven't really been able to partake in the nightlife since I've been here because I've been doing the show, and those two don't really go hand in hand. It was an exciting time in New York, and it seemed as though the possibilities were endless. I felt a kind of freedom I hadn't felt anywhere else.

You hit 40 later this year. How do you plan to celebrate?

I'm going to do a big party. I haven't had a big birthday party in a long time. I plan on being in New Orleans and having all my friends over for a huge party.

You released your first single in five years with the Scissor Sisters in 2017, five years after your last gig as a band. Are there any plans to re-form?

No, I don't think so. I've got too much on my plate at the moment. I think this is what I'm doing now, and I think when people hear this album, they'll understand why. It definitely feels the start of a new chapter for me. Maybe some day we'll do something, but at the moment, I don't necessarily feel like I've got anything to say through that filter. We had a great run and we had a lot of fun. We had a solid 10 years and made a lot of great memories. I think writing the book was sort of a good way for me to put a cap on it for now, and move forward. I'm ready to do my own thing now.

Finally, where do you see yourself as a performer in 10 years' time?

I love having multiple projects going on. I want to keep writing. I'm going to turn my hand to fiction for a while, and see where that takes me. I'm going to write another musical, and I want to keep making albums. So I hope in 10 years' time there's a handful of Jake Shears' albums, a couple of shows and God knows what else. I like to stay busy.

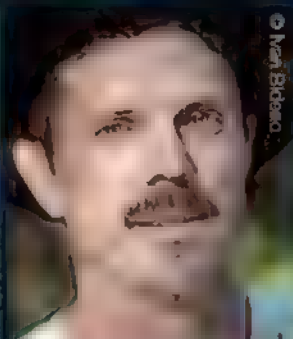
Jake performs at Birmingham Pride on Sunday 27 May. He'll also be chatting about his memoir, *Boys Keep Swinging*, at Birmingham Town Hall on Sat 6 May.

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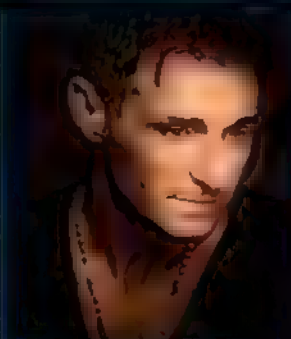
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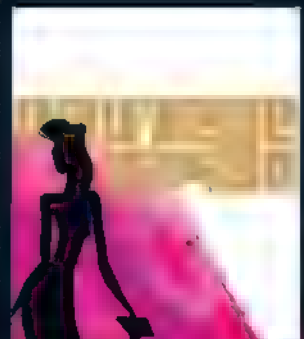
RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE WERQ THE WORLD TOUR
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LET'S HAVE A KIKI AT BIRMINGHAM PRIDE

It's one **EPIC** line-up for this year's
Birmingham Pride!

It's nearly time to get all glittered up and ready to party at Birmingham Pride, with festival organisers announcing yet another fantastic line-up!

Gossip star **Beth Ditto**, DJ **Jax Jones**, drum & bass legends **Rudimental** (with a DJ set) and Scissor Sisters frontman **Jake Shears** have all been announced as headliners, with many more fabulous artists also featuring on the bill.

All four headliners (pictured) have achieved huge success with top ten singles: Gossip with Standing In The Way Of Control; Jax Jones with You Don't Know Me (featuring last year's Pride star, Raye), Rudimental and John Newman with Feel The Love, and of course the Scissor Sisters with I Don't Feel Like Dancing.

If you were to add together all the YouTube views and Spotify streams connected to the artists appearing at this year's festival, you'd probably arrive at a figure of several billion!

Birmingham Pride's 2018 line-up is indeed a pretty epic one, so you'd best grab your tickets now and start planning your outfits

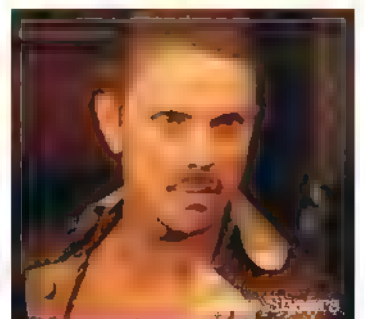
Let's make this a party to remember!



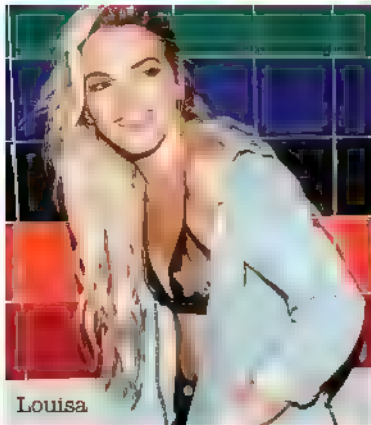
Beth Ditto



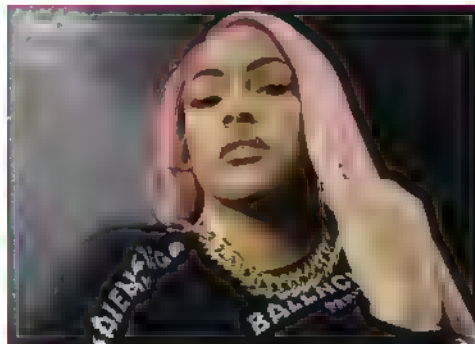
Rudimental



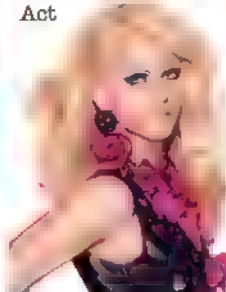
OTHER ARTISTS AT PRIDE...



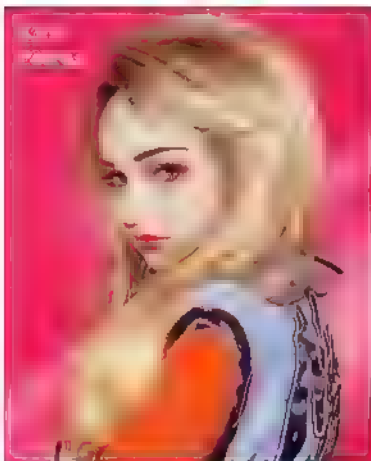
Louisa



Courtney Act



Louise



Gorgon City



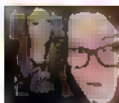
PLUS MANY MORE!

Your TOP 15 soundtracks to Birmingham Pride

based on Spotify listens

1. You Don't Know Me - Jax Jones **338.4 million**
2. Lay It All On Me - Rudimental **304.3 million**
3. These Days - Rudimental **146.7 million**
4. Instruction - Jax Jones **121.7 million**
5. Bum Bum Tam Tam - Stefflon Don **98.1 million**
6. Waiting All Night - Rudimental **98 million**
7. Breathe - Jax Jones **77.3 million**
8. More Than Friends feat. Kelli Leigh **58.1 million**
9. Hurtin' Me - Stefflon Don **48.7 million**
10. All Four Walls - Gorgon City **32.5 million**
11. I Don't Feel Like Dancing - Scissor Sisters **30 million**
12. Heavy Cross - Gossip **29.8 million**
13. Real Life - Gorgon City **28.5 million**
14. Take Your Mama - Scissor Sisters **27.9 million**
15. Standing in the Way of Control - Gossip **11.6 million**

What some people are saying about this year's line-up on social media:



"WOW! That's a pretty impressive line-up!"
Lauren Walker - Birmingham



"Oooh! A bit of '80s for us oldies!"
Becca Sullivan
Birmingham



"Booked it! Whooooooo hooooooo!"
Neet Bahns



"Ahhhh! This SO exciting!"
Curtis Smith



"The rest of the line-up is shaping up very nicely!"
Anth May
Birmingham



"The line-up sounds pretty sick this time!"
Zoe Sharp - Rugby



"OH.. MY.. GOD!"
Richard BeeBee
Walsall



"OMG! I'm like OMG, OMG, OMG!"
Laura Parks



"I'm actually so excited right now!"
Chelsea Kiteley - West Brom

BIRMINGHAM

Pride
2016

BIRMINGHAM'S
GAY VILLAGE

SATURDAY 26TH MAY

BE YOU

MAIN STAGE

BETH DITTO
JAX JONES

STEFFLON DUN
LOUISA
KELLI-LEIGH
KIM PETRAS

UNDERGROUND

REDLIGHT FLAVA D

LISASHARRED ANTIX JOE HUNT THE WOLF EXPERIMENT
DAVEY BOY FELTON FEAT. KAISHA SMITH CLINTON SHAWE YAN

STREET VENDOR MARKET

THE D.E. EXPERIENCE LORRAINE BOWEN SANDRA
MISS THUNDERPUSSY TWIGGY

KELLY WILDE MISS PENNY LOLA LASAGNE SHANIA PAIN
BAGA CHIPZ SUM TING WONG DAVE LYNN AND MAISIE TROLETTE

BIG FREEDIA ALLIE X KARTEL BROWN

MS BANKS BEEP ME 911 HARD C*CK LIFE JAYDON CLOVER
DUPES DEN UNPRONOUNCEABLE IM NOT OKAY JAMAAL MONARCH

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BABY D, WE LOVE POP, GLITTER SH*T, **COURTNEY ACT**

GORGON CITY **02:31** **HOOVER CLUB**

DJ ZINC **JAMIE BULL** **TOM** **LOVE MUSCLE**
(HOMOELECTRIC) **SHORTERZ**

THE MANCHESTER AIRPORT CABARET STAGE

VICKY JACKSON AS PINK **TOTALLY TINA**

WILLY DUBOIS IN THE HALL OF MIRRORS **SANDRA**

DRAG WITH NO NAME **MARTHA D'ARTHUR** **DIVINE MISS M**

CHAMPAGNE SHIRLEY **AMY LA** **QUEEFA MISS MARTY**

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To PrEP or not to PrEP

You have your say about the new 'wonder drug'...



We took to our Facebook page to ask our readers what they thought of PrEP. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a course of HIV drugs taken before sex to reduce the risk of getting HIV

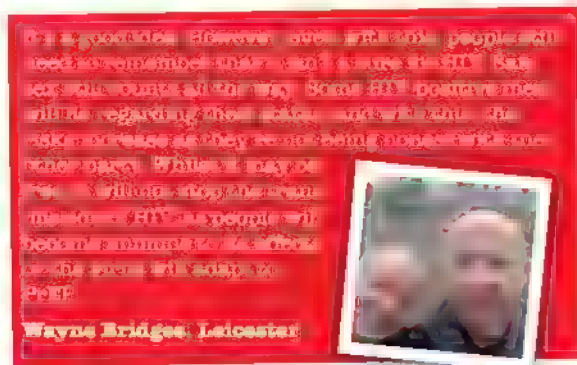
We asked whether you think PrEP is a good idea, or whether it's an excuse to get out of safe sex. Should it be free? Would you use it? Here's what you had to say...



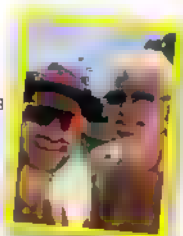
Each to their own. I'm not here to judge. But bear in mind that continued use of the drug, like

with all others, can have an adverse effect on the kidneys and their function. So remember to get them checked regularly also.

Ricky Finlan, Birmingham

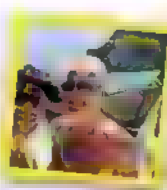


Me and my husband are on the PrEP trial. Being on PrEP is regarded as a safe-sex choice. Admittedly, it doesn't protect against STIs, but it should be seen, in an overall context, as a safe-sex choice alongside regular testing. **Andy McLester**



I want to commence PrEP - I'm happy to pay but want to be confident that what I'm buying is genuine and will do the trick. My local GUM clinic are unable to really help

David Bigg



Want PrEP? A PrEP Impact trial has now begun in Birmingham!

Patients interested in taking part will need to book into a PrEP advice clinic. Participation in the trial will be on a 'first come, first served' basis. There are limited places available on the trial, and PrEP medication is only available at the following times and clinics: 09:30 - 11:30 on the first, second and fourth Thursday of each month at Birmingham LGBT Centre 13:00 - 15:00 on the third Monday of each month at Whittall Street Clinic To book an appointment at one of these clinics, call 0121 237 5700.

It shouldn't be free on the NHS. Having unprotected sex means it's your choice and you will be responsible for the consequences. If you're a responsible person, use a condom...

Jean Paul Kay, Birmingham



Youth group for people aged 13-18
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Patent information awards:
www.patentawards.co.uk



Award-winning Birmingham gay-scene DJ Corey Hadley and her wife, Dani, have a new addition to their family, after using local clinic IVI Midland to bring Séamus into the world. Corey and Dani tell Zone about their journey...

When did you decide to start a family?

Corey: We got married in 2014, and we decided to get married not only to cement our relationship, but also so that when we did start a family, it was official that I would be the other legal parent. It wasn't long after Dani and I got together that she said she'd like to start a family. It's been a long time, though - maybe five or six years.

Dani: We agreed before we got married that it was what we both wanted. We didn't want it to be a cross in the road. We also both agreed that if, for whatever reason, we weren't successful, it wasn't going to break our relationship.

Did you look at all the options for starting a family?

Dani: Yeah, we never ruled out adoption; I certainly didn't. But then we found this clinic that's local, and they took us down different paths to explore other routes. Assisted conception was our preferred way to start a family. Adoption was certainly never dismissed, and had we been unsuccessful with assisted conception, that was the second route we were going to take.

How did you choose the clinic?

Corey: It started with the NHS at the women's hospital. Everyone there was great, but it wasn't right for us. Because we were investing so much time, love and emotion into this, we didn't feel we were getting the support we needed from them.

That's when we looked into clinics nearby, and IVI in Tamworth was one of them. We went over there for a consultation and they ticked all the boxes for us. We felt that they were on the same page as us, as opposed to the NHS, who are brilliant in what they do, but it was just a bit 'conveyor belt', which we never felt with the clinic. We felt the clinic were on the journey with us, and not just taking us from one place to the other.

How long did it take from initially speaking to the clinic to becoming pregnant?

Dani: It took a little longer than we wanted. Because they were so thorough, I discovered through one of the tests that I had a thyroid issue. So we had to get my

blood levels to a point that was safe to carry on. So it took longer than we wanted, but I think we first went to the clinic in April or May 2016 and had a positive pregnancy test 12 months later

What did the process involve when you went to the clinic?

Corey: We had a counsellor to make sure we were on the right page and prepared to be parents. It wasn't like bullying; it was really nice. They helped us to manage our expectations, ensuring we understood that it's not always going to be a positive result. The counselling was good

Dani: The medical team were good, too. They were very honest about the process. People just assume that because you're in a gay relationship there are no infertility issues and you're going to get pregnant immediately, but that's not always the case. They essentially told us it might not happen overnight and could take a couple of attempts. But 12 months later we had that positive pregnancy test, which was pretty good.

Now you've been through the process, would you have done anything differently?

Corey: I'd have done it earlier and not waited so long. I'm regretting now when I used to say to Dani, "Oh let's have another all-inclusive holiday" or something else. Séamus (pronounced Shay-mus) coming into our lives is a blessing. He's an absolute godsend

Dani: I think I'd agree with that - a couple of years earlier would've been nice. But people are choosing to have children a lot later now anyway

Corey: And the good thing about doing it later is that we have no regrets about missing out on anything before becoming tied down with kids. We've done everything we wanted to do, and we've got a very strong, stable relationship. I felt it was the right time for us.

Dani: We feel we're in the position where we can offer Séamus everything he needs.

How did you settle on Séamus's name?

Dani: We weren't entirely 100% sold on it and were holding back until we met him, to see if it would suit him. We decided on it because we wanted an Irish name. My family is Irish, so we wanted that Celtic connection. So Séamus seemed like a nice name. My grandfather was called Séamus, so it was a nice family connection too, and

we think he's big and brave enough to carry it on.

How are you enjoying being parents?

Dani: I'm not going to lie, it's the hardest thing I've ever done. I thought that I'd done some pretty difficult things in my life, and it sounds like a cliché, but it's the most rewarding, life-changing, happiest experience ever.

Corey: He's like a vacuum. You look at the clock and it's 1pm and you say, I'll get ready to be out of the house by 2pm - but come 3pm you're still there doing nothing but blowing raspberries on his tummy. It's a blessing, and we're only five weeks into it, so we're knee-deep in nappies.

Corey, you're an award-winning DJ. How do you juggle doing that and being a mum?

Corey: It works well, actually. I'm used to having a completely disturbed sleep pattern, which I've had for 20 years. I'm used to being up till 6am in the morning, and I'm used to taking disco naps in the afternoon. It's working quite well. Luckily, Dani doesn't mind getting up in the morning, which I can't do. So I'll take the night shifts with him, and Dani can do the early morning ones. I've always found DJing to be a bit of therapy. If I've had a bad week or I feel a bit stressed, I can go into a room with really loud music and within half an hour, all my worries have gone. It works really well, and at least I'm not doing a nine-to-five job where I'm out of the house all day without him. I can still take him to the park every day, and I'll be able to take him to school and pick him up from school. Also, being a DJ, I have to keep current with what's happening in the world, so as he gets older, I'll know what's number one in the charts. When I was growing up, my mum didn't have a clue.

Were your families supportive of you during your journey towards having a family of your own?

Dani: Yes, they've been on cloud nine from the moment they were told we were having a child. They are all delighted and very supportive.

You're a big part of the LGBT community. Have they been supportive throughout?

Corey: Massively. As soon as we announced it on Facebook, I walked into the club and loads of people were coming up to me offering me hugs and congratulations. I had girls coming up to me saying they were

going to do it with their partners. People were asking about the clinic or asking about the NHS. It's been nice being able to guide people and show them that you can do it, that you're not restricted. It shows them that we have just as much right to have children as a heterosexual family, and that anything is possible. Dani and her family run Velvet Music Rooms Bar on Broad Street, Birmingham, which has a mixed but predominantly heterosexual clientele, and the support there has been incredible too. We haven't experienced any prejudice whatsoever, which is great.

What were the high and low points of your journey?

Corey: Having a child is the happiest moment of your life and the scariest moment of your life. I'd never been so petrified. I have the utmost respect for every single mother. I also think it's brought Dani and I even closer together. I've found even more respect for her on another level.

Dani: I think the labour was more dramatic for Corey than it was for me! To see all the mothering and parental side of it coming out of both of us is great. We thought we knew each other inside and out, but when you introduce a new member of the family, you definitely see another side.

Corey: I would say that if you were looking to go on this journey yourself, make sure your relationship is really strong before you do it. It's hard, it's stressful and it's emotional.



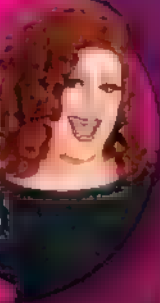
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Midlands

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Readers' Awards 2018

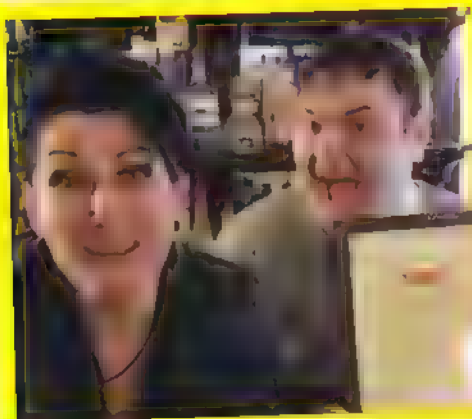
Winners announced!

Brum's Eden Bar bags 8 Gold awards

The big winners this year were once again Garry and Cal from Eden, scooping eight Gold awards and numerous Silver and Bronze ones too!

WINNERS:

- Best Front of House Person - Garry Prentice
- Best Front of House Team
- Best Security Person - Steve Barrett
- Best Gay Venue Security Team
- Best Birmingham Overall Gay Venue
- Best Birmingham Gay Bar
- Best Midlands Community Venue
- Best Midlands Bar/Club for Men



The Fox is still loved by the girls!

Hilli and Lewis from The Fox accepted the Gold award for Best Bar For Women! The venue has been going for over 20 years now - and Andy King, the bar's gaffer is probably running out of room for these awards as he wins it every bloody year!



Lawrence goes for Gold!

We're starting to lose count of how many times Lawrence Barton has won Scene Personality Of The Year. He's obviously a favourite amongst our readers. Well done, Lawrence!

**more WINNERS
announced!**

ZONE Readers' Awards 2018

Simply Outstanding!

Keith Perks wins Outstanding Contribution to the LGBTQ Community Award!

Keith has been awarded this for his many year's of service to Birmingham Pride where he was lead volunteer up until his retirement from the role in 2017. Congratulations Keith, you did a fantastic job.



Triple whammy for Coventry gay bar The Yard!

It's not even been open a year but the new kid on the block in Coventry has scooped up three Gold awards! The people of Coventry obviously love them, so they must be doing something right!

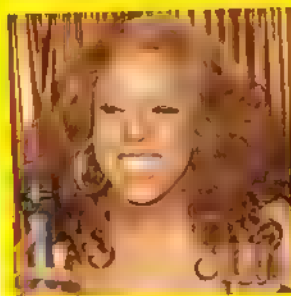
WINNERS:

Best Midlands Gay Bar (Outside B'ham)
Best Midlands Gay Nightclub (Outside B'ham)
Best Midlands New Gay Venue



The Village Inn's Sandra London wins Gold for Best National Cabaret Act...

She's pretty much a legend around the whole of the UK, so it's no surprise that Village Inn resident Sandra has bagged this award!



Glitter SHIT

wins Best One-Nighter award!

It's a first win for the Glitter SHIT team - the event takes place at The Nightingale and the guys go to huge amounts of effort with theming and decor - so it's much deserved!

Best Midlands Club DJ

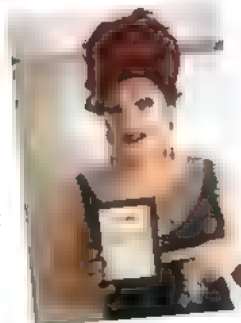
She's done it again! Corey Hadley from The Nightingale wins Gold for Best Midlands Club DJ! Bless her, she was shocked when we gave her the award! Well done, Corey!



Miss Penny

gets Best Midlands Cabaret Act! AGAIN!

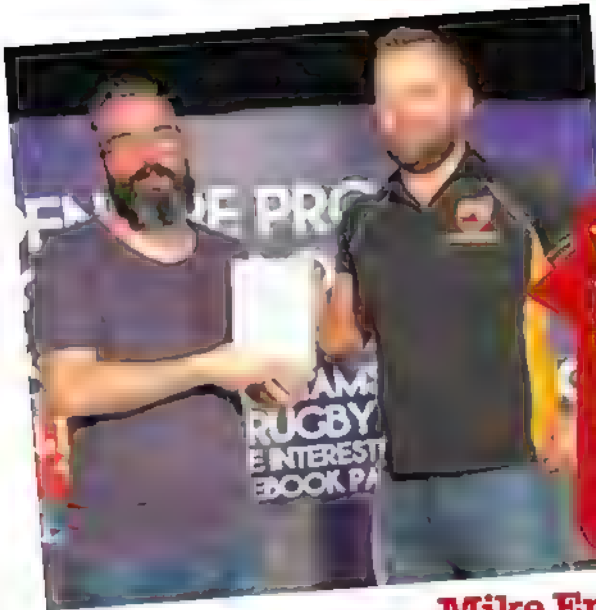
It was won last year by Laqueefa, but now Miss Penny will be glad to have her hands back on this title! Sadly Penny, there's no prize money so we can't help you with your addiction to Gregs!



Midlands

ZONE Readers' Awards 2018

more WINNERS announced!



What a load of bull! Birmingham Bulls win Best Midlands Sport of Social Group!

Birmingham Bulls RFC, the city's inclusive rugby team, have scored Gold for all the hard work they do, both on and off the pitch! We're sure they'll have a great time celebrating this award!

Gorgeous Club retains the Best Overall Venue award!

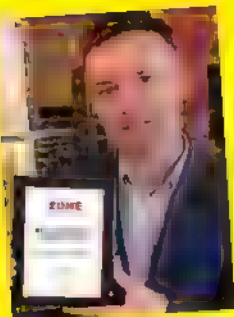
Sean Keasey, Ricki Wellman and the team at Gorgeous in Wolverhampton retained their Best Midlands

Overall Gay Venue (Outside Birmingham) award! Well done, Team Gorgeous!



Birmingham Pride wins again!

It's no surprise really that Birmingham Pride has bagged Best Midlands Pride Event for the umpteenth time! Big thumbs up to Leicester Pride and Coventry Pride who were awarded Silver and Bronze respectively!



Mike Emery mixes it up and wins Gold for Best Midlands Bar DJ...

A big well done to Missing Bar and Glamorous' Mike Emery for getting his hands on this Gold award for the first time! He's a staple on Birmingham's gay scene, so when you next see him, tell him congratulations!

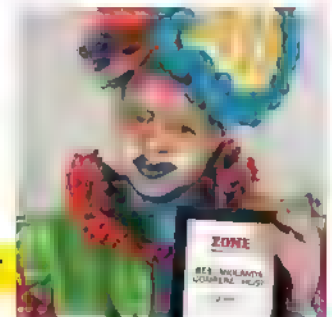


The Loft still on TOP for Best Café Bar & Restaurant

Jon Ingram picked up the award on behalf of the whole team at The Loft for Best Midlands Café Bar & Restaurant - which they seem to have won more times than the Midlands Zone team have had hot dinners! Keep up the good work guys!



Best Host goes to Queeny...



Despite stiff competition, the Best Midlands Compere & Host award went to The Village Inn's Queeny - Brum's favourite Drag Clown! Big congrats go to Marty who received Silver and to Stoke's Destiny Dyson who won Bronze!

Best Midlands LGBT Charity

A huge congratulations to Birmingham LGBT who once again win Gold in this category! You do great work, so do keep it up!



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Respect
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Women's Aid & Refuge
24-hour National Domestic Violence Freephone Helpline
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Here's the full list
of **WINNERS** of this
year's awards...

Midlands

ZONE

Readers'
Awards 2018

Best Midlands Bar DJ

Gold Mike Emery - Missing
Silver Richard Moon - Village Inn
Bronze Toni Lee- Eden
Other finalists
Destiny Dyson Gossip
Deano Trickett The Village

Best Midlands Club DJ

Gold Corey Hadley - The Nightingale
Silver Paul Morrell - XXL (The Core)
Bronze Shaun Baxter - Gorgeous
Other finalists
Robbie Lewis Nightingale
Rob Lambeth Helsinki

Best Midlands Front of House Person

Gold Garry Prentice - Eden
Silver Ollie Betts - Missing
Bronze Sara McEnery - The Yard
Other finalists
Hill Fletcher The Fox
Stephen Lambert Missing



Midlands Gay Venue with the Best FOH Team

Gold Eden
Silver Village Inn
Bronze The Fox, B'ham
Other finalists
The Nightingale
Dover Castle, Leicester

Best Midlands Security Person

Gold Steve Barrett - Eden
Silver Janine Webb - The Yard
Bronze Wayne Turner - Missing
Other finalists
Kevin Muligan The Nightingale
Carl Cuno Gossip

Midlands Gay Venue with the Best Security Team

Gold Eden
Silver The Nightingale
Bronze Missing
Other finalists
Gossip, Stoke-on Trent
The Village, Birmingham

Best Midlands Compere / Host

Gold Queeny
Silver Marty Smith
Bronze Destiny Dyson
Other finalists
Charlotte the Harlotte
Miss Penny

Best Midlands Cabaret Act

Gold Miss Penny
Silver Vicky Jackson
Bronze Laqueefa
Other finalists
Marty
Twiggy

Best National Cabaret Act

Gold Sandra
Silver Danny Beard
Bronze Mary Mac
Other finalists
La Voix
Charlie Hides

Midlands Scene Personality of the Year

Gold Lawrence Barton
Silver Garry Prentice
Bronze Miss Penny
Other finalists
Amy LaQueefa
Andy King

Best Birmingham Overall Gay Venue

Gold Eden
Silver The Nightingale
Bronze The Loft
Other finalists
Missing
The Village Inn

Best Birmingham Gay Nightclub

Gold The Nightingale
Silver Glamorous
Bronze Club Chic
Other finalists
Bo.tz
Bar Jester

Best Midlands Gay Nightclub

(outside Birmingham)
Gold The Yard, Coventry
Silver Gorgeous, Wolverhampton
Bronze Gossip, Stoke-on-Trent
Other finalists
The Lion, Walsall
Helsinki, Leicester

Best Birmingham Gay Bar

Gold Eden
Silver Village Inn
Bronze Missing
Other finalists
The Loft
Sidewalk

Best Midlands Gay Bar

(outside Birmingham)
Gold The Yard, Coventry
Silver The Lion, Walsall
Bronze Rainbow & Dove, Leicester
Other finalists
Dover Castle, Leicester
The Red Lion, Walsall

Best Midlands Overall Gay Venue

(outside Birmingham)
Gold Gorgeous, Wolverhampton
Silver The Yard, Coventry
Bronze The Lion, Walsall
Other finalists
Gossip Stoke-on Trent
Dover Castle, Leicester

Best Midlands Community Venue

Gold Eden
Silver The Fox
Bronze The Wellington
Other finalists
Dover Castle, Leicester
The Yard, Coventry

Best Midlands Café Bar/Restaurant

Gold The Loft, B'ham
Silver The Yard, Coventry
Bronze Sidewalk, B'ham
Other finalists
The Wellington, B'ham
Rainbow & Dove, Leicester

Best Midlands Bar/Club for Men

Gold Eden
Silver Boltz
Bronze The Fountain Inn
Other finalists
The Core, Birmingham
The Lion, Walsall

Best Midlands Bar/Club for Women

Gold The Fox
Silver The Nightingale
Bronze Gorgeous, Wolverhampton
Other finalists
Gossip, Stoke-on Trent
Sidewalk, Birmingham

Best Midlands Gay Venue Outdoor Area

Gold The Loft
Silver Eden
Bronze The Lion, Walsall
Other finalists
Gossip, Stoke-on Trent
The Village Inn

Best Midlands New Gay Venue/Refurbishment

Gold The Yard, Coventry
Silver Bar Diva, Dudley
Bronze Glamorous, Birmingham
Other finalists
Gossip Stoke-on Trent
Rhapsody Birmingham

Best Midlands Live Entertainment Venue

Gold The Village Inn
Silver The Nightingale
Bronze Eden, B'ham
Other finalists
Dover Castle, Leicester
Glamorous, Birmingham

Best Midlands One-Nighter

Gold Glittershit at The Nightingale
Silver XXL at The Core Club
Bronze BearBrum at Eden
Other finalists
Birmingham Fetish Men at Eden
Seathi at The Nightingale

Best Midlands Pride Event

Gold Birmingham Pride
Silver Leicester Pride
Bronze Coventry Pride

Other finalists

Stoke-on Trent Pride
Walsall Pride

Best Midlands LGBT Event

Gold SHOUT Festival
Silver Pride In Sport, Birmingham
Bronze Picnic In The Park, Birmingham
Other finalists
L Fest, Staffordshire
Shropshire Rainbow Film Festival

Best Midlands LGBT Charity/Group of Achievement

Gold Birmingham LGBT
Silver Coventry & Warwickshire Friend
Bronze Terrence Higgins Trust
Other finalists
Positive West Midlands
Trade Sexual Health

Best Midlands Sport or Social Group

Gold Birmingham Bulls RFC
Silver Birmingham Blaze FC
Bronze Birmingham Gay Symphony Orchestra
Other finalists
Acting Out, Birmingham
Birmingham Swifts

Best Midlands Sauna/Health Club

Gold Unit 2 Birmingham
Silver The Greenhouse, Darlaston
Bronze Splash, Leicester
Other finalists
Spartan Birmingham
CS2 Nottingham

Best Midlands LGBT-friendly Retail Store

Gold Clonezone
Silver John Lewis, Birmingham
Bronze Selfridges, Birmingham
Other finalists
Harvey Nichols, B'ham
Bang & Strike online

A HUGE congratulations to everyone of our winners and finalists for a great year! Keep up the hard work!



THE FAAAAAABULOUS CERI DUPREE

Having played Ugly Sister Voluptua in Birmingham Hippodrome's Christmas pantomime version of Cinderella, female impersonator extraordinaire Ceri Dupree this month returns to the venue with his one-man, 21-woman show, featuring impersonations of some of the world's most iconic divas...

From Camilla Parker Bowles and Cilla Black, to screen icons of Hollywood and pop princesses old and new, Ceri's inimitable delivery, energy and style bring together hilarious comedy, fantastic showmanship and more than a sprinkling of Las Vegas style glitz and glamour! As Ceri says, "If it's worth doing, it's worth overdoing!"

We caught up with him to discover more about the fabulous females past and present who feature in his latest lavish stage offering...

Who first inspired you to go into showbusiness?

Well, when I was a little boy, I had three idols - Stanley Baxter, Dick Emery and Danny La Rue - and I loved them all. I suppose it was through my parents taking me to pantomimes from an early age that I started to think, I want to do that one day. I wanted to be a costume designer too, but I'm *wearing* the costumes now. Actually, I still design them, but I get to wear them as well!

You're well known for being one of the UK's leading female impersonators. How does that differ to 'drag' in your eyes?

I always say I'm a female impersonator because I'm first and foremost an impressionist. I don't have a 'character', like Paul O'Grady or Barry Humphreys - I impersonate internationally recognised female artists, soap stars, comedienne and famous personalities across the board. I've impersonated Lily Savage, I've impersonated Dame Edna, don't get me wrong, but as part of a repertoire of impersonations! That's the fundamental difference.

What's been the most memorable venue you've performed in?

There have been lots, but I would have to say Athens in Greece. I performed to 2,000 people in a nightclub there. They wanted me to do the singer Nana Mouskouri, who's a real icon in Greece. I was sending her up in a very tongue in-cheek way, but I thought to myself, if I do this here, they'll kill me, as she's so revered!

Anyway, we put her into the show (somewhere in the middle, so as not to draw too much attention) and it went down an absolute storm, - so much so that the following night I opened the show as Nana! The more I sent her up, the more they laughed!

"I'm a female impersonator because I'm first and foremost an impressionist. I don't have a 'character', like Paul O'Grady"

Do you have a favourite female in your repertoire?

I have lots. Interestingly, the audience favourites are often not my favourites. I like the old stars, like Mae West, Bette Davies and Marlene Dietrich. I suppose the more current ones are people like Joan Collins, Cher, Bette Midler and Lady Gaga. The audience favourites tend to be Tina Turner, Amy Winehouse and - believe it or not - Camilla Parker Bowles. She's like the Wicked Queen in pantomime. They all start booing when she enters the stage. Audiences love to hate her, I suppose. And, you wouldn't necessarily expect it, but I still do Gladys Pugh from Hi-De-Hi and audiences lap it up. Even younger audience members who wouldn't necessarily remember her

still seem to find it funny!

If you could travel back to any showbiz era, which would it be?

It would have to be the 1970s because that's when showbusiness was really out there. We only had three channels on the television, and there was no such thing as Twitter or Facebook. You had variety, you had a lot more people who would go to the theatre. You had summer seasons that ran for 20 to 24 weeks. It was a great time to be performing! I didn't start until 1982/83, but I would've loved to have been around in the heyday of the big cabaret clubs and large-scale variety entertainment. Oh, and there was also glam rock in the 1970s!

Who's currently on your wish list to impersonate?

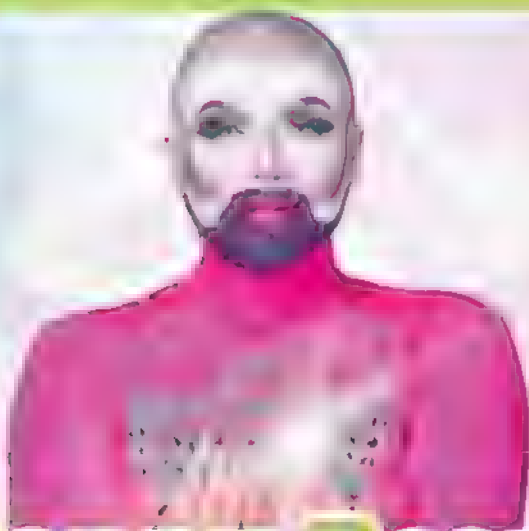
The one I'm working on at the moment is Cilla Black. I did her years and years ago, but then of course she sadly died, and I didn't want to put her back in the repertoire straight away as it would've been in bad taste. Time has moved on enough now for us to do an affectionate send up or a tongue-in-cheek tribute, as I like to think of it. It's very difficult these days to find the stars to do. Our television now is full of reality shows. My pet hate is the term 'reality TV star'; you're not a star. Shirley Bassey's a star! Tom Jones is a star! Why would I want to impersonate someone like Gemma Collins?! Having said all that, I would love to do someone like Paloma Faith, as she's amazing, so watch this space!

The Faaaaaaabulous Ceri Dupree Show visits Birmingham Hippodrome on Fri 27 & Sat 28 April.

For tickets, call 0844 338 5000 or visit birminghamhippodrome.com

What's On

Sun 1 - Sun 8 April



Danny Beard

returns to Birmingham's Eden Bar!

Glitter god Danny Beard makes his way back to his Birmingham home of Eden Bar this month, for what's set to be another fantastic night out.

If you've not seen Danny before, then you really are missing out! The Britain's Got Talent star offers amazing vocals, hilarious tales and oodles of utterly cheeky banter.

Saturday 7 April - Eden, Birmingham



Marty's Party

heads to Coventry

Birmingham's legendary Marty Smith is heading down the road to Coventry to bring you The Yard this month. The Yard is a new gay venue in Coventry, and Marty's Party is the perfect place to enjoy a night of fun and laughter.

Friday 6 April - The Yard, Coventry

Fancy &1 drinks in Coventry?

If you're on a bit of a budget or just fancy a midweek night out, head on down to new Coventry gay venue Glamorous. Every Thursday is Kapownd! night, serving up &1 drinks and providing one of the best parties in the city.

Every Thursday - Glamorous, Coventry

It's going to be a Wilde night in Brum!

Dance vocalist Keady Wilde this month makes a welcome return to Birmingham's award-winning gay venue, The Village Inn, entertaining the crowds with her vast collection of tracks as part of the venue's weekly cabaret line-up.

You'll be dancing until dawn, so make sure you're wearing comfortable shoes!

Friday 6 April - The Village Inn,



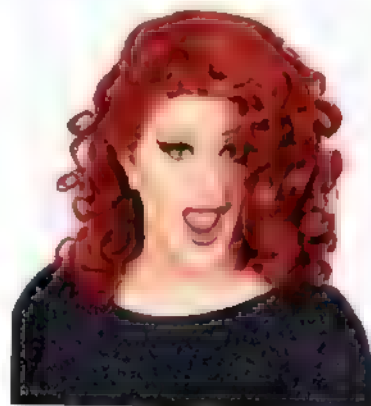
Fanny Burns

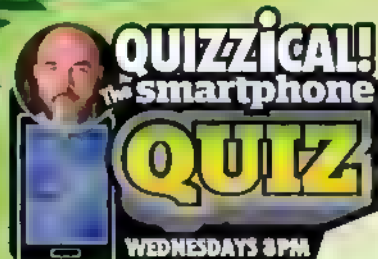
returns to Shrewsbury for Fabulous Mondays

It's set to be another brilliant night at Shrewsbury venue Havana Republic this month, as Fanny Burns returns to the stage for Fabulous Mondays, the town's only dedicated gay night!

Expect a lot of laughter and fun, plus a good old fashioned sing song!

Monday 2 April - Havana Republic, Shrewsbury





WEDNESDAYS 8PM
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With our fresh take on the
pub quiz, players use their
smartphones/tablets to
answer and the speed factor
makes cheating impossible!



THUR
5th

SAT
7th

SAT
14th

THUR
19th

FRI
20th

SAT
21st

SUN
22nd

THUR
26th

SAT
28th

VICKI VIVACIOUS

DANNY BEARD

LA VOIX

DANNY BEARD

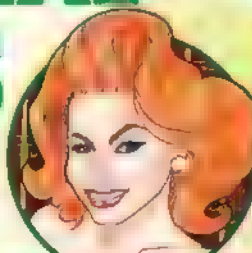
MIDS BEARS

BRENDA LaBEAU

LEATHER SOCIAL

LISA Q JONES

MARY MAC



IS BULLS DEEP-FUNDRAISING WITH BIRMINGHAM BULLS **WARNING! THIS SHOW MAY CONTAIN NAKED RUGBY PLAYERS!**



14th & 28th
DJ TONI LEE

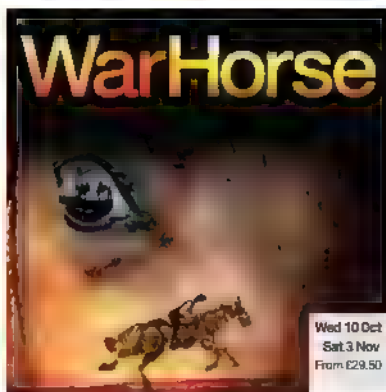
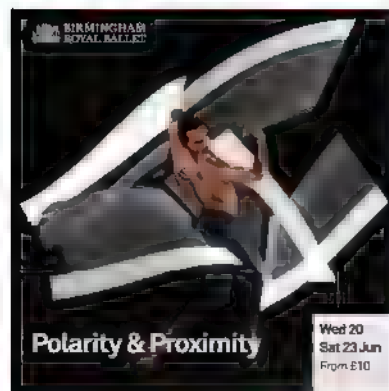
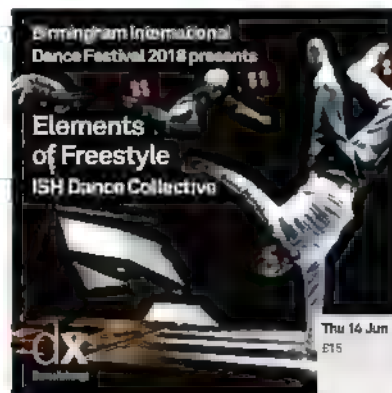
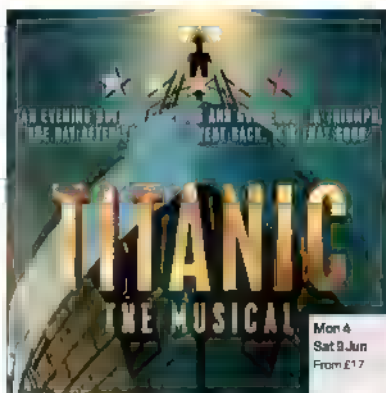
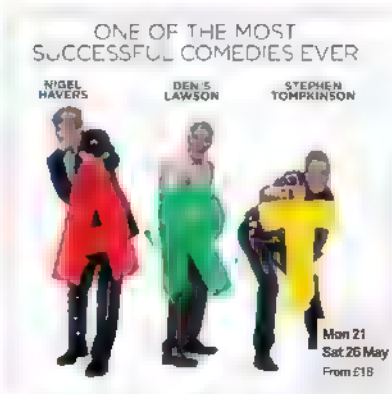


7th & 21st
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What's On

Mon 9 - Sun 15 April



Davina Davey brings all the boys to The Yard!

Drag queen Davina Davey heads to Coventry's The Yard this month for another night of fantastic cabaret fun! If you enjoy a singalong, then this is one of the best nights the city has to offer! It's a great atmosphere at The Yard, so make sure you check it out!

Friday 13 April - The Yard, Coventry



La Voix brings showbiz to Brum

La Voix is a class act, as evidenced by her semi-final appearance on Britain's Got Talent. If you haven't seen one of her fantastic shows yet, put that right by popping along to Eden Bar this very month.

Saturday 14 April - Eden Bar, Birmingham

Miss Jason takes to the stage in Birmingham



Birmingham's Village Inn - the Midlands Zone Readers' Award winner for Best Live Music Venue - hosts fantastic live cabaret each and every week. Friday the 13th may be unlucky for some, but certainly not for anybody who visits the popular venue, where an evening with the inimitable Miss Jason awaits. Expect great entertainment and fabulous drinks offers!

Friday 13 April - The Village Inn, Birmingham

Mike Emery gets the party going!



If like us, you love a midweek party, then you should head to Birmingham's Glamorous Bar for a great night out with award-winning DJ Mike Emery. Mike will be playing only the best tunes all night long and really getting you into the party spirit! **Every Monday, Wednesday & Friday Glamorous, Birmingham**

Let's get Quizzical!

Wednesday nights at Birmingham's Eden Bar offer the chance to pit your wits against your mates in the all new Quizzical event. Hosted by DJ Poni, the quiz involves using your smartphone to answer a few rounds of tricky questions. So if you fancy yourself as the next Egghead or Chaser, then be sure to head down to the venue and try it for yourself.

Every Wednesday - Eden, Birmingham

What's On

Mon 16 - Sun 22 April



There's Sum Ting Wong at The Village Inn!

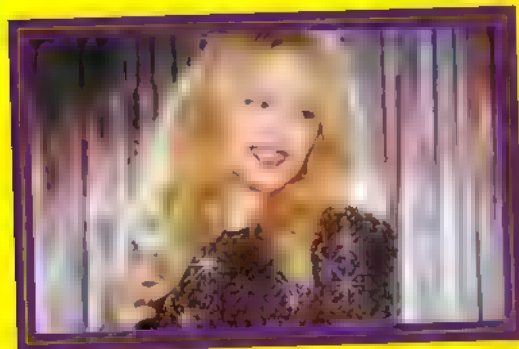
Another great cabaret act heads to Birmingham's Village Inn this month! Drag Idol finalist Sum Ting Wong will be live on stage, entertaining the masses with her super-fantastic act. If you haven't seen her yet, be sure to pop along - she's fab!

Friday 20 April - The Village Inn, Birmingham

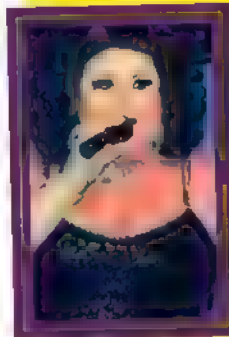
We should be so lucky! A night dedicated to Kylie Minogue!

If you're a Kylie superfan, then this is the event for you! The Loft in Birmingham is hosting a night dedicated to the diminutive Aussie superstar, so expect to hear her greatest hits and plenty more.

Saturday 21 April - The Loft, Birmingham



Coventry cabaret with Fannie Coil



There's yet another night of cabaret to enjoy at Coventry gay venue The Yard this week. This time it's with the fantastic Fannie Coil!

If you haven't visited The Yard yet, then why not pop along?

Friday 20 April - The Yard, Coventry

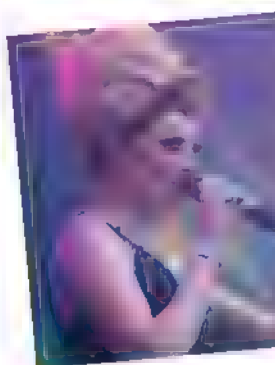


The Gale's going all P!nk...

If you're a fan of music by Pink, take note - there's a whole night dedicated to it at Birmingham's Nightingale Club this month. Get this party started.

Saturday 21 April - The Nightingale, Birmingham

Weekend cabaret with Brenda LeBeau



There's always plenty of Saturday night fun to be had at Birmingham's Eden Bar!

This week sees the fantastic Brenda LeBeau take to the stage for an action-packed show that's sure to have you in stitches and get you singing along! Get there early - it's set to be a busy one!

Saturday 21 April - Eden, Birmingham

Furry fun with MidsBears at Eden

If you're a bear, or a friend of the bear community at large, then pop down to MidsBears at Eden every third Friday of the month. It's a great night out and attracts a fab crowd. Check it out - you'll love it!

Friday 20 April - Eden, Birmingham

LGBT POLSKA

LGBT Polska is a social meet up group for the Polish LGBT community and their friends in the West Midlands

The group meets every second Friday of the month on different venues in Birmingham's Gay Village

contact@lgbtpolska.co.uk

0121 444 4444

lgbtpolska@gmail.com

www.facebook.com/LGBTPolkaBirmingham

www.lgbtbham.org.uk



the laaaaaaahabulous

Ceri Dupree
show

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birminghamhippodrome.com

PATRICK
STUDIO
AT BIRMINGHAM HIPPODROME

The Loft

The
Kylie
Night

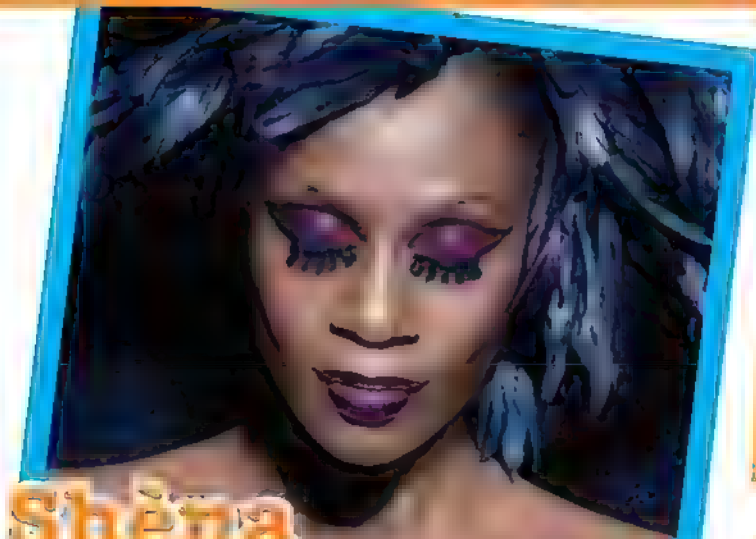
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What's On

Mon 23 - Sun 30 April



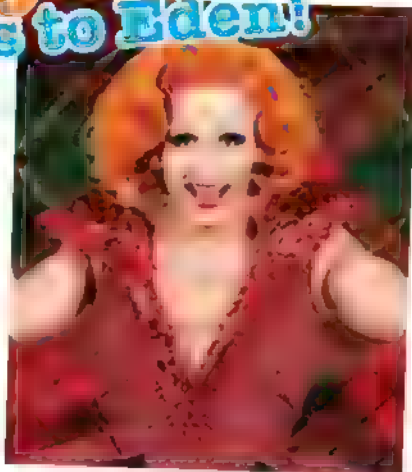
Shëna Nu-disco vocalist heads to Coventry!

Nu disco vocalist Shëna is heading to The Yard in Coventry this month. She'll be performing hits such as There's Nothing I Won't Do, The Weekend, Take Me To The Clouds Above and Dare Me. It's going to be a great night out, so head along and enjoy it!

Saturday 28 April - The Yard, Coventry

Mary Mac returns to Eden!

Scotland's finest drag queen is back at Birmingham gay venue Eden this month, performing in the bar's marquee. Plus, there's great music to be dancing along to from DJ Toni Lee!
**Saturday 28 April
Eden, Birmingham**



Sandra's back in town!

Hear me now! This week's Friday night cabaret at Birmingham's award winning Village Inn is drag veteran Sandra London. She'll be taking to the stage for a night of fun-filled comedy and singalong magic. Why not start off your weekend in style with a great night out?

**Friday 27 April - The Village Inn,
Birmingham**

Anyone for a cocktail?

You've had a great weekend partying in Brum's gay village and then along comes Monday to bring you back down to earth with a great big bang. But fear not, there's still fun to be had. Every Monday, The Loft runs its hugely popular Cocktail Club, serving two cocktails for just a tenner from 8pm until late. There's a massive menu to choose from too, meaning there's something for everyone to enjoy.

Every Monday - The Loft, Birmingham

Weekly karaoke at The Yard!



Up for a bit of a mid-week sing song? Then be sure to head along to Coventry gay venue The Yard. There, you'll be joined by Minnie & Jupiter from 8pm onwards, catering for all your karaoke needs. There's even a free shot for every singer!
**Every Thursday
The Yard, Coventry**

COMING SOON TO THE NEW ALEXANDRA THEATRE



MON 16 - SAT 21 APR



TUE 15 - SAT 19 MAY



MON 21 - SAT 26 MAY



TUE 12 - SAT 16 JUN



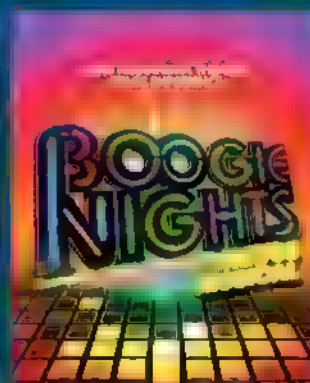
MON 16 - SAT 23 JUN



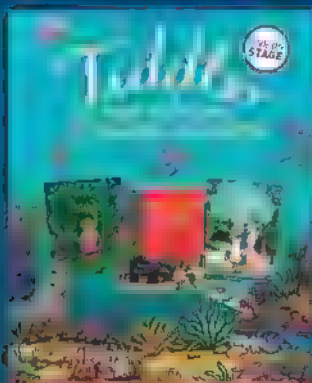
TUE 26 - SAT 30 JUN



TUE 31 JUL - SAT 4 AUG



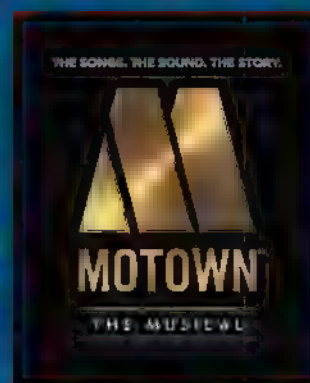
WED 22 - SAT 25 AUG



THU 30 AUG - SAT 1 SEP



TUE 25 - SAT 29 SEP



THU 11 OCT - SAT 1 NOV



MON 8 - SAT 10 NOV

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What's On

120 Beats Per Minute

Set in Paris during the 1990s and based on the film-makers' own experience, this drama takes us back to the dark days of the AIDS epidemic. In particular, the film focuses on the activist outfit ACT UP and its attempt to combat the French government's inertia. Winner of the Grand Prix at last year's Cannes shindig, as well as winner of the French Oscar for best film.

Released nationwide on Friday 6 April



An Officer and a Gentleman - The Musical

An Officer And A Gentleman was the movie that really made a star of Richard Gere, with women everywhere - and no doubt a good few guys too - choosing to overlook his narrow eyes and enormous hooter in favour of luxuriating in the magic of his incredible sex appeal. This musical version of the movie is world premiering at the Curve, and boasts a big fat load of unforgettable 1980s anthems, including Girls Just Want To Have Fun, Livin' On A Prayer, Heart Of Glass, Material Girl, Don't Cry Out Loud and The Final Countdown.

Friday 6 - Saturday 21 April, Leicester Curve; Tuesday 15 - Saturday 19 May, Birmingham Hippodrome; Monday 23 - Saturday 28 July, Nottingham Theatre Royal

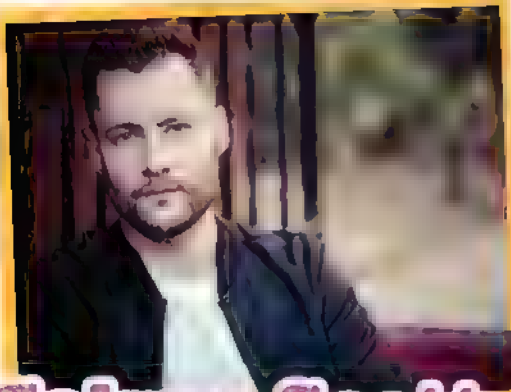


Sam Smith

Whenever Sam Smith feels he may be getting too big for his boots, he brings himself down to earth with an almighty bump by remembering his former life scrubbing crappers clean in a local bar. Not that there's much chance of the out'n'proud superstar-singer ever needing to stuff his arm up a u bend again, what with his career going from strength to strength. He's out on tour and visiting Brum in support of his album, The Thrill Of It All. Special guest Bruno Major lends support.

Tuesday 3 & Wednesday 4 April, Genting Arena, Birmingham

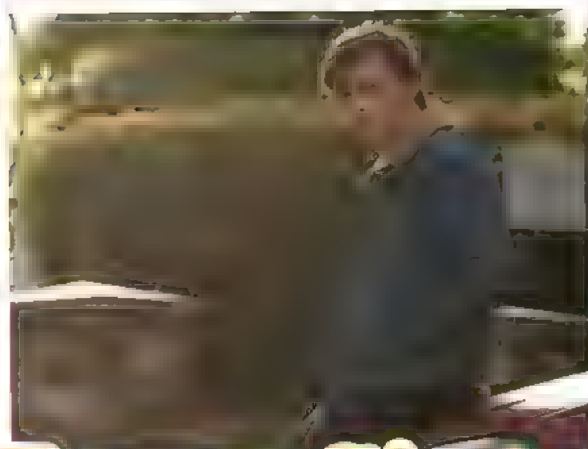




Calum Scott

Openly gay singer-songwriter Calum Scott has come a long way since his days in a Maroon 5 tribute band. With debut album *Only Human*, released last month, enjoying a fair amount of critical acclaim, and his net worth estimated to already be in excess of \$2million, the one-time Britain's Got Talent finalist is one of the rising stars on the UK music scene. Our advice is to catch him in concert asap, before tickets to his gigs start costing the proverbial arm and leg

Friday 20 April, Rock City, Nottingham and Sunday 22 April, O2 Institute, Birmingham



Love, Simon

Mother's Ruin: A Cabaret About Gin

Story and song combine in a theatrical cabaret that stops off in 18th century London, the Australian bush, a few New York speakeasies and the jungles of Peru.

At its heart is the story of gin, presented by two of Australia's rising cabaret stars via the contribution of numerous characters - from sailors and barmaids to bootleggers and master distillers. The show comes complete with music originally performed by, among others, Amy Winehouse, Nina Simone, Martha Wainwright, The Popes and The Pretenders

Thursday 26 April, MAC Birmingham



Dancing On Ice Live Tour

Torvil and Dean hit town with their celebrity skating show. If you love nothing more than the sight of a big-shot celebrity falling flat on their probably overpaid celebrity arse, then this could well be the show for you (although the celebs are all pretty good skaters, darn 'em, so maybe not!)

Denise van Outen joins Jayne and Chris in casting a judgmental eye over the participating stars, with Donna Air, Jake Quickenden, Max Evans and Alex Beresford among those putting their aforementioned backsides on the line

Tuesday 10 - Thursday 12 April, Nottingham Motorpoint Arena and Friday 13 - Sunday 15 April, Arena Birmingham



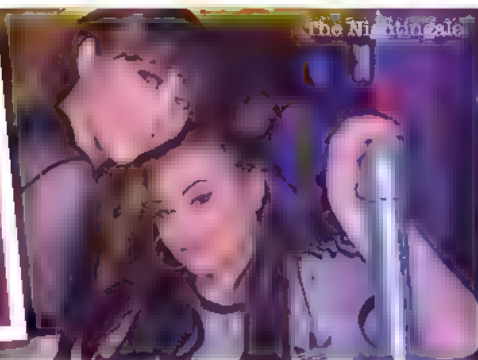
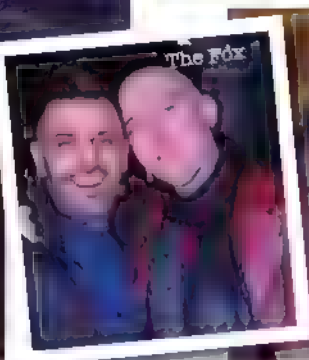
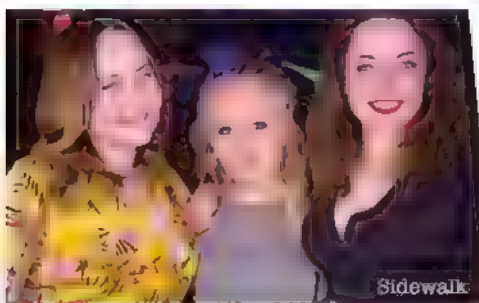
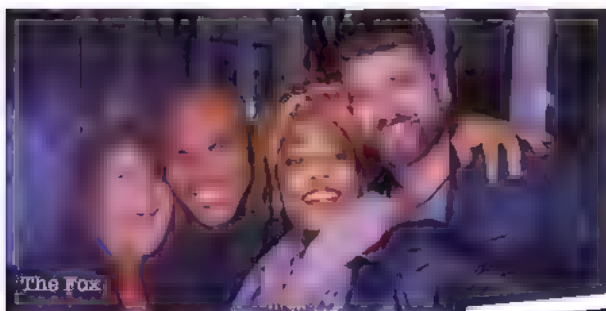


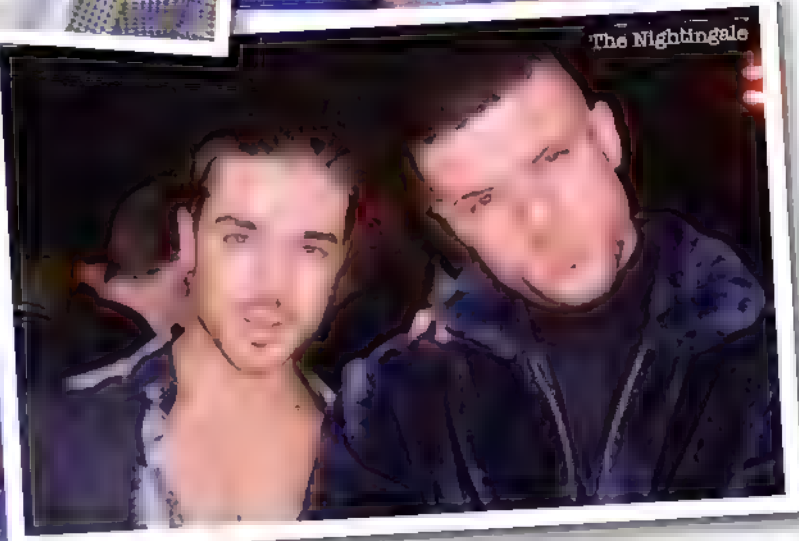
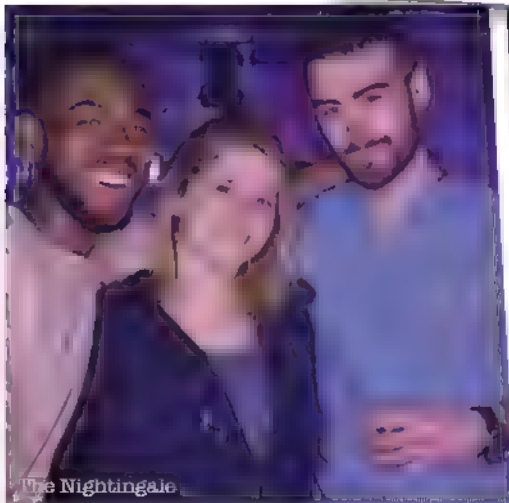
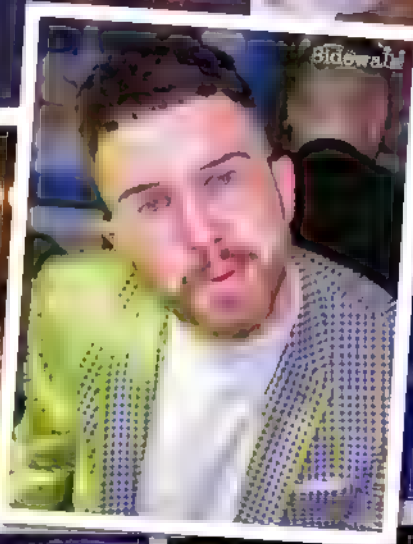
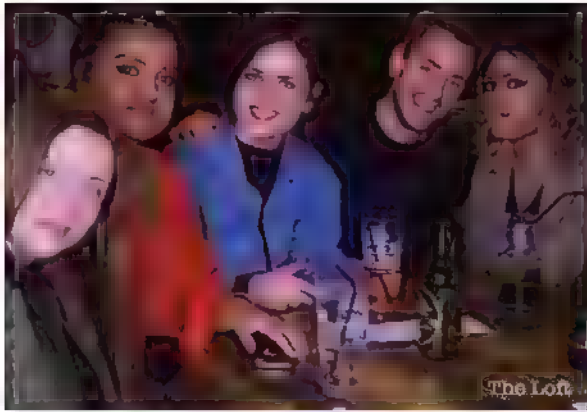
Party all night in vibrant Birmingham



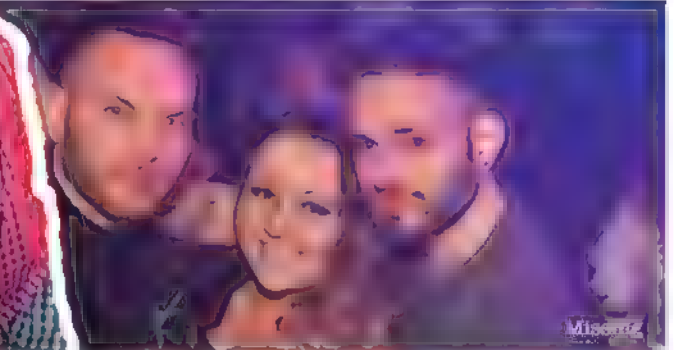
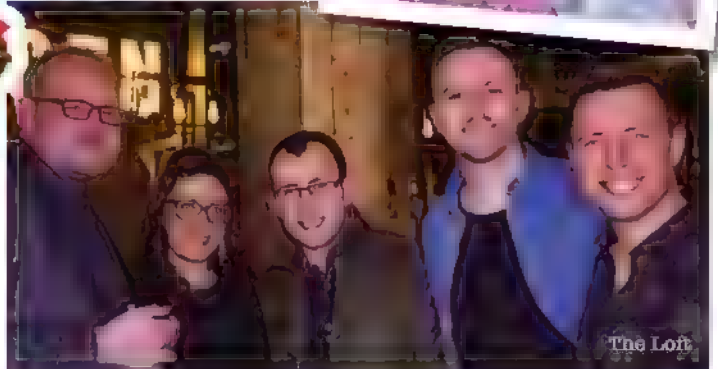
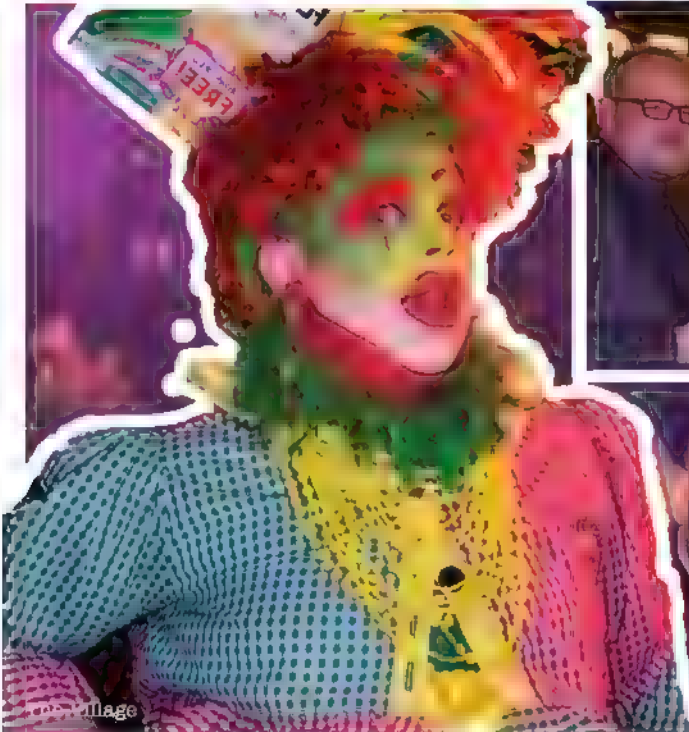
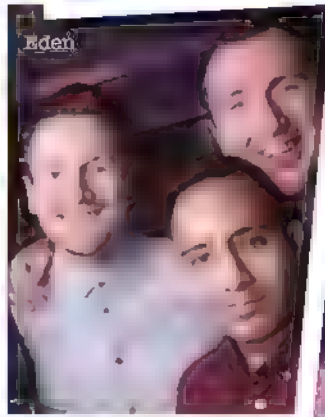
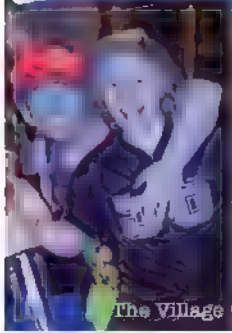
If you're out for the night in Birmingham, then the city's gay scene is a great place to be!

With over 15 bars and clubs to choose from, there really is something for everyone! It's a truly great night out!





Party all night in vibrant Birmingham



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GLAMOROUS

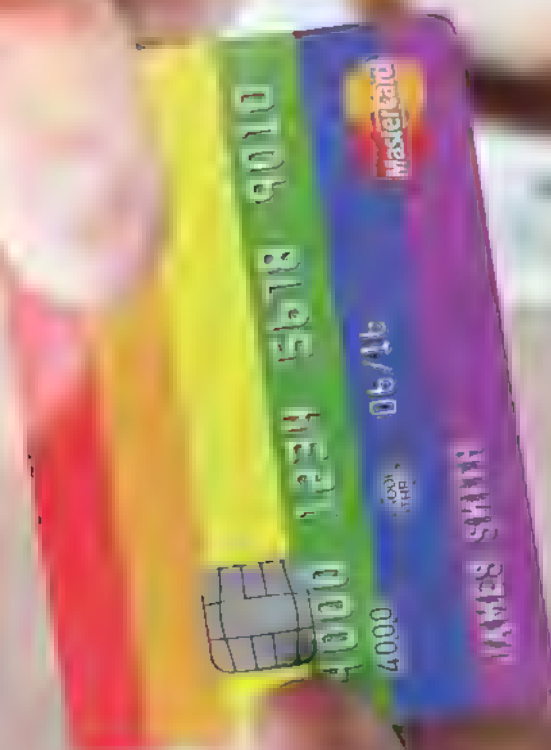
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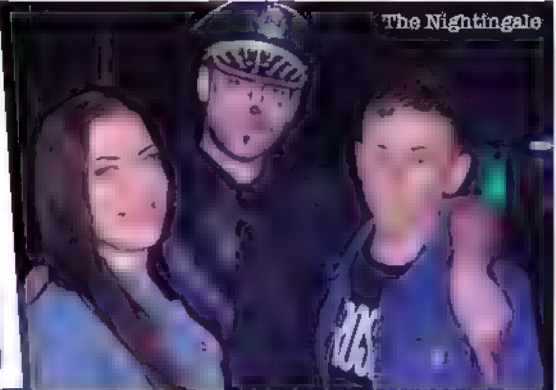
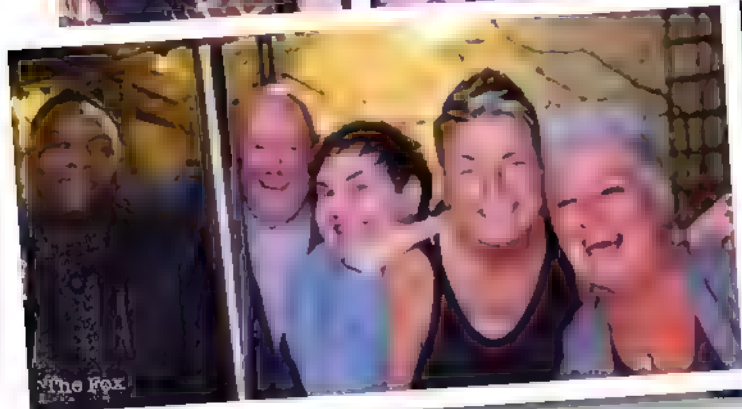
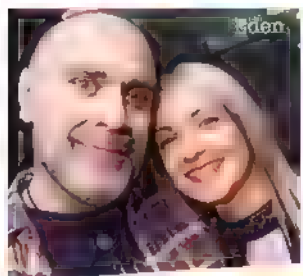
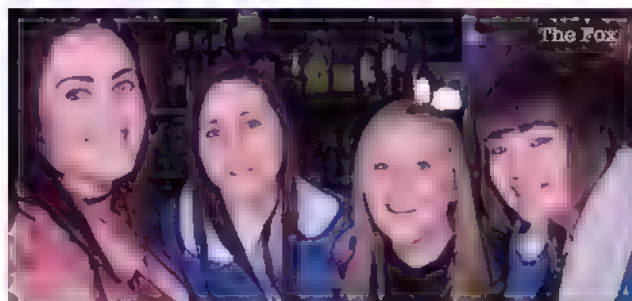
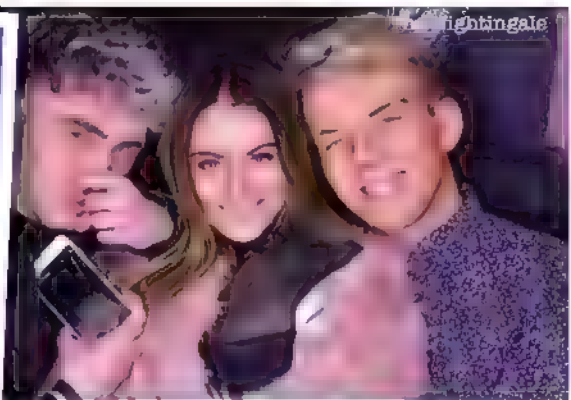


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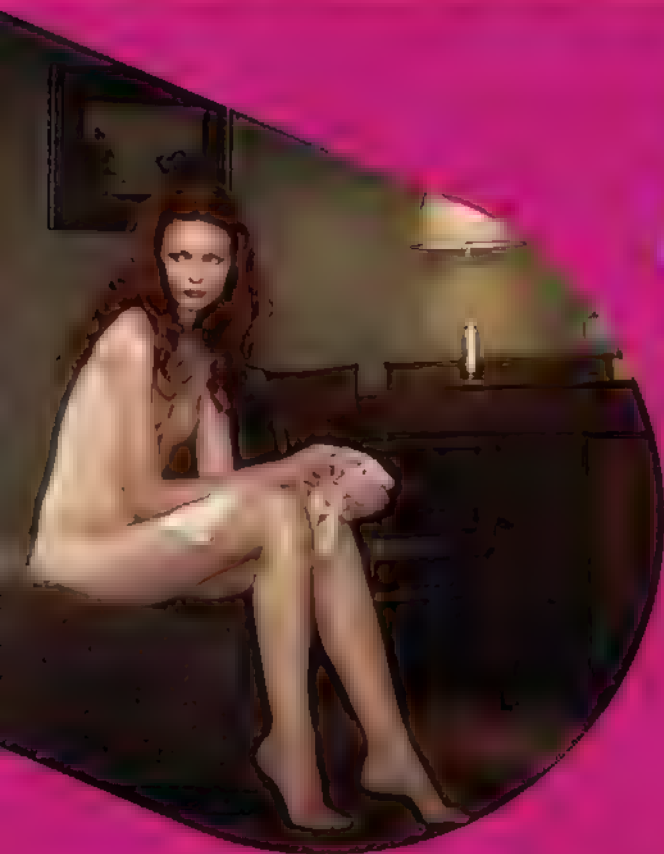


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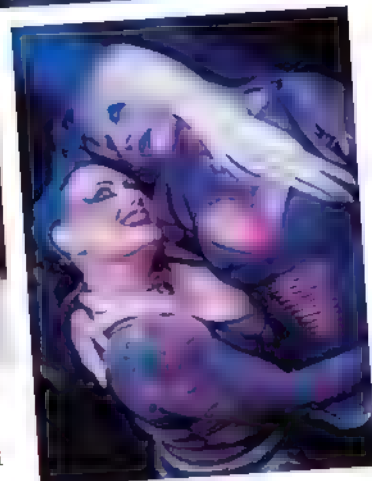
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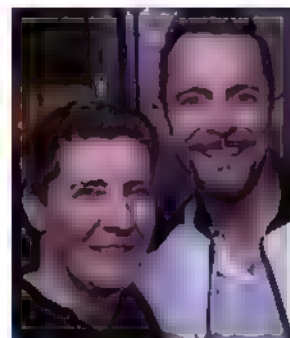
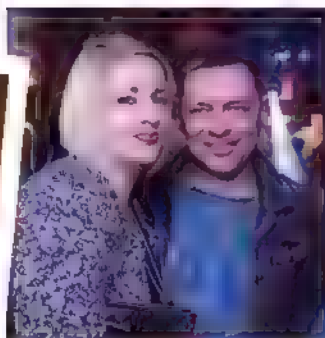
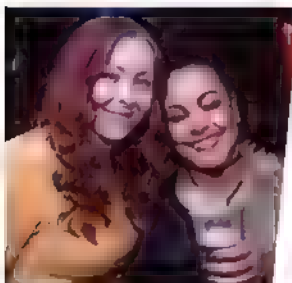
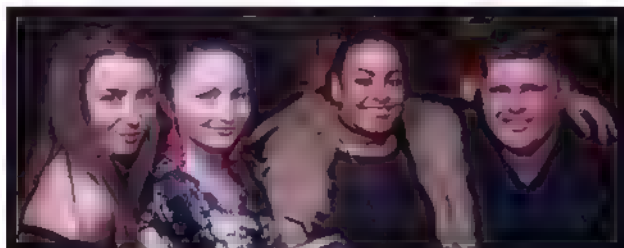
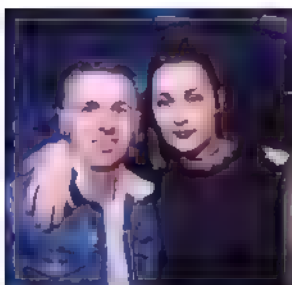
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Pictures by Luz Harvey

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QUEENY

GOLD



MISS PENNY



SANDRA

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**KELLY
WILDE**



FRIDAY 13 APRIL

**MISS
JASON**

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Readers
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**THE
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SILVER

BEST MIDLANDS CABARET ACT



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SILVER

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**THE
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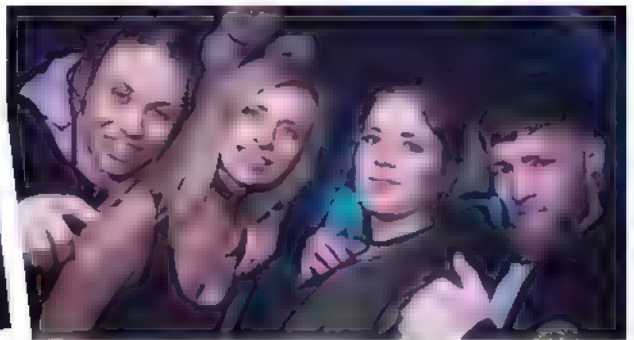
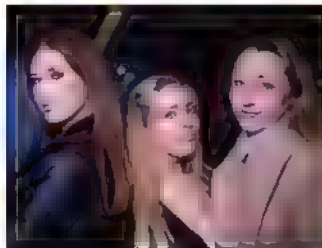
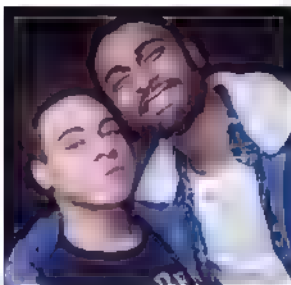


A **Gorgeous** night out in Wolverhampton



If you're looking to party in Wolverhampton, head down to local LGBT venue Gorgeous for an evening of top-class revelry!

Bringing together a great atmosphere, cracking drinks offers, fabulous customers and fantastic music, the venue offers a truly Gorgeous night out.



Pictures by Laura Byrne

the
yard

APRIL

FREE
PUB

CABARET

FRIDAY 17TH APRIL

MISS ADRIAN

FRIDAY 18TH APRIL

DAVID DAVIES

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FANNIE GILL

FRIDAY 20TH APRIL

GLORIA GIRLS

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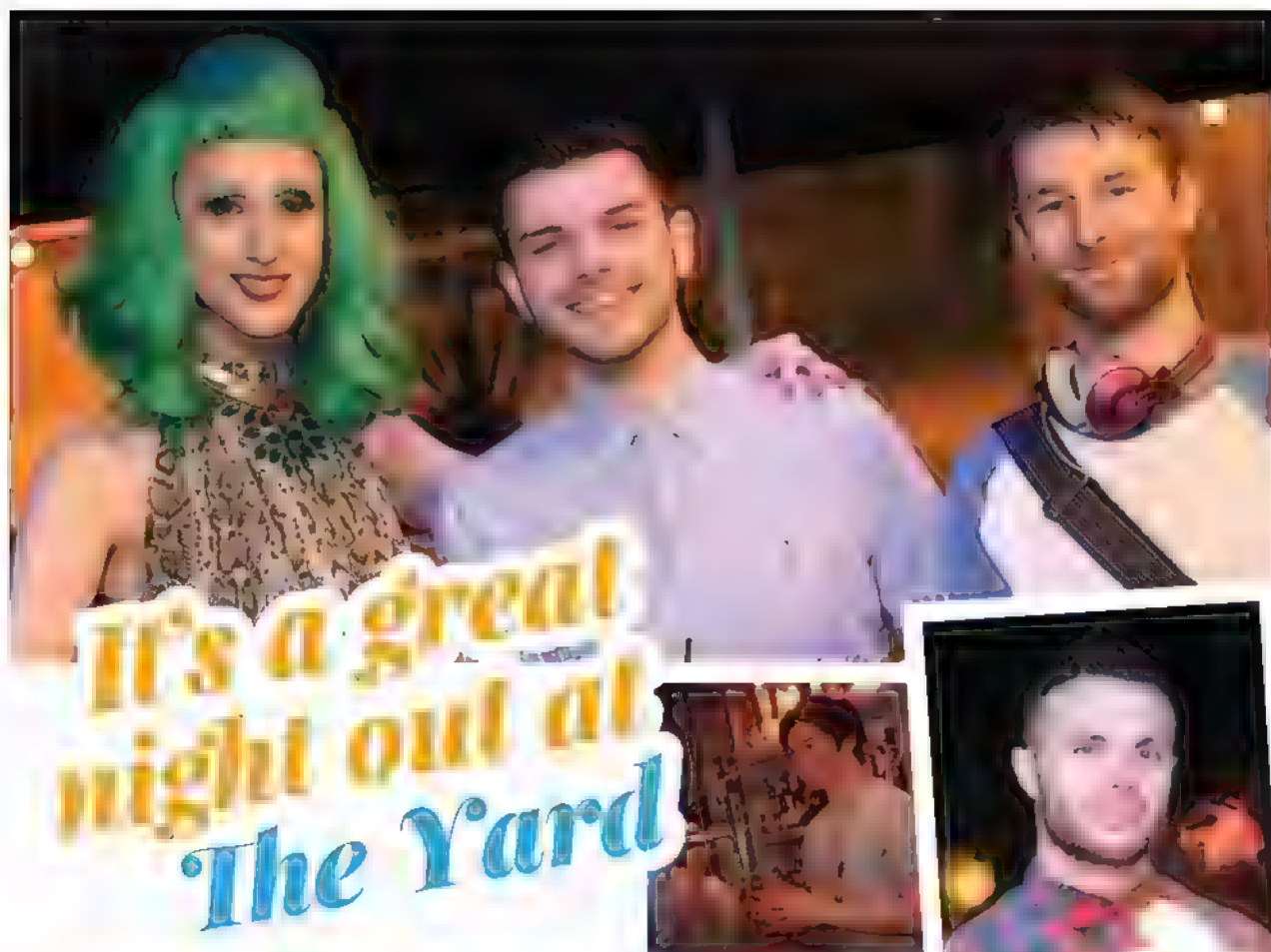
SATURDAY 28TH APRIL

On stage

SHENA

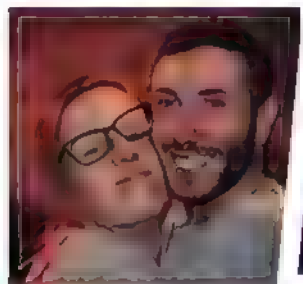
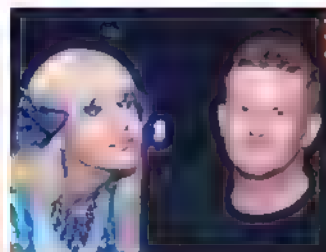
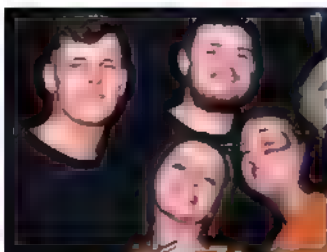
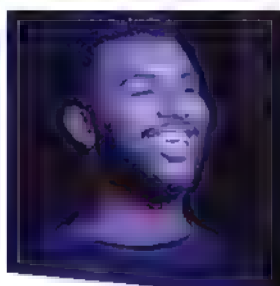
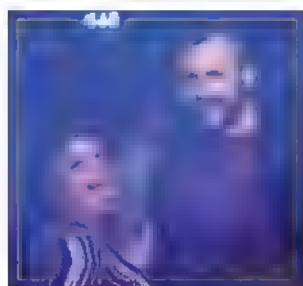
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THE YARD 11-12 BULL YARD COVENTRY CV1 1LH WWW.THEYARDCOVENTRY.CO.UK



If you're looking to party in Coventry, head for LGBT venue The Yard and enjoy an evening of top-class revelry!

Bringing together a great atmosphere, cracking drinks offers, fabulous customers and top-notch weekly cabaret, the venue offers a truly fantastic night out!



Pictures by The Yard

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Tel: 0121 666 6806

THE CORE
Sherlock St, B5 6NB
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www.thecoreclub.co.uk

DEVILS KITCHEN
Kent St, B5 6NB

EDEN BAR
Sherlock St, B5 6NB
Tel: 0121 622 1953
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RHAPSODY BAR
Hurst St, B5 6SE
Tel: 0121 622 4046

FOUNTAIN INN
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THE FOX
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B5 6SN Tel: 0121 622 3213

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THE LOFT
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B5 6RG
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f/thenightingaleclub

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THE VILLAGE INN
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West Midlands

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monthly 7 Windsor St
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f/gorgeousbar

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WIN! A pair of tickets to see **Ceri Dupree** in Brum!

Faaaabulous female impersonator Ceri Dupree is on the road again - and Midlands Zone have teamed up with Birmingham Hippodrome to give you a chance to win a pair of tickets to see his show on Friday 27 April!

Ceri's latest offering comes complete with new costumes, routines, jokes and songs - plus, of course, his trademark impersonations of some of the world's most fantastic females, with characters both old and new adorned in jaw-droppingly spectacular costumes! Look out for HM The Queen, Camilla, Cilla Black, a tribute to Hollywood and Broadway, and some of the greatest-ever female pop stars! A touch of Las Vegas glitz and glamour is brought to the stage in this fast-paced and gloriously over-the-top

show. Ceri's energy, style, showmanship and appreciation of his audience shines bright in a one-man, 21-woman extravaganza that's not to be missed.

The Faaaabulous Ceri Dupree Show runs at Birmingham Hippodrome on Friday 27 and Saturday 28 April, with tickets available at birminghamhippodrome.com

To enter our competition, just visit midlandszone.co.uk and answer the following question:

How many women does Ceri Dupree impersonate in this show?

- A) 21
- B) 31
- C) 41



Competition closes on Monday 23 April.
Enter online at midlandszone.co.uk

A large advertisement for G21 Garçon Model. The background features a close-up of a man's face and upper body, heavily tattooed. The text is overlaid on the image.

G21
GARÇON MODEL
BIRMINGHAM
84 HURST STREET, B5 4TD
MANCHESTER | LONDON: SOHO | LONDON: EARLS COURT
CLONEZONE.CO.UK | 0121 666 6640

A logo for CZI, featuring the letters 'CZI' in a bold, stylized font inside a shield-like shape with red and white stripes at the bottom.

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*Kwik Prick is not available on Public Holidays

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Time: 3pm - 6pm

Place: 30 Bedford Street South,
Leicester, LE1 3JR



Splash Spa & Leisure

Day: Thursdays

Time: 3pm - 6pm

Place: 61 Bedford Street,
Leicester, LE1 3JR

Further information available:
www.leicestersexualhealth.nhs.uk



You can also check out Trade
Sexual Health.

www.tradesexualhealth.com



▶ Samsung Galaxy S9

The main new feature coming to the Samsung Galaxy S9 is a redefined camera. The radical super Slow Mo camera shoots at an incredible 960 FPS, perfect for turning everyday moments into epic viral worthy videos. Capture that trophy-clinching goal or the electrifying moment the band takes to the stage. Samsung's first ever dual aperture adjusts like your eyes for pro-quality pictures in bright sunshine, super-low light and even moonlight.

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samsung.co.uk

◀ Sony Xperia XZ2

The Xperia XZ2 is packed with the latest Sony technologies to deliver an entertainment experience that 'touches your senses' in a whole new way whether you're lost in a HDR movie or capturing hidden details with the new, advanced Motion Eye camera.

£699.00
amazon.co.uk



▲ Nokia 8110 4G

It's the return of an icon! Much like the original, the new Nokia 8110 4G has a curved, protective cover you can slide open to pick up calls and slide back to end them. The unique shape also means you can spin the phone in ways you never imagined. You can surf, chat and stream faster with 4G LTE. Plus, the wireless hotspot feature lets you create your own wi-fi connection wherever you are
Coming Soon
nokia.com

Great gadgets for Spring

The latest in mobile technology, and the return of a classic...



◀ GoPro Fusion

The new GoPro Fusion captures spherical video and photos, recording everything so you can find the best shots later. Play it back in VR or use Over Capture to create traditional videos and photos you can share on your phone. With ultra-smooth stabilisation and 5.2K video, the GoPro Fusion is like having a professional film crew with you wherever you go!

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Food and drink news from across the Midlands...

Pizza and prosecco festival heading for Coventry

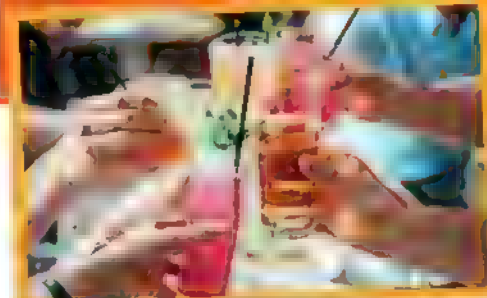
After a hugely successful national tour in 2017, the Pizza & Prosecco Festival is visiting Coventry this summer. A preliminary but subject-to-change date has been set for 21 July, with the host venue yet to be announced.

The boutique event will see every ticket-holder given a free slice of pizza and an Aperol Spritz cocktail. Dancers, live music and vendors selling gluten free and vegan options also feature. Visitors can enjoy more than 20 different types of prosecco, a variety of sparkling cocktails from the Tiny Tipple Van and delicious pizza from traders such as Doughboys, Ffwrnes and The Original Goodfillas



Wolverhampton set to host its first cocktail festival

Wolverhampton is set to host its first cocktail festival, which will take place on the 11th of April. The event will be held at the city's new waterfront development, which is a mix of residential and commercial space. The festival will feature a variety of cocktails, live music, and food. It is expected to attract a large number of visitors to the city.



The Ivy Collection opens in Birmingham

A 135-cover brasserie will open its doors in the heart of Birmingham on Wednesday 11 April. The Ivy is situated on the city's Temple Row, in a building formerly occupied by Louis Vuitton, and will offer sophisticated yet relaxed all-day dining. The menu will include a truffle chicken sandwich, The Ivy Collection shepherd's pie and seasonal grilled fish, as well as light and healthy brunch options, afternoon teas and an extensive cocktail menu.

Birmingham Area

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LIFE OF A THIRTYSOMETHING GAY

66'97'99

The summer of '97 was hot. So hot it was stifling. I'd just turned 17 and, breaking up for the school holidays after my GCSE exams, I was bored with the six week break even before it had begun.

Sat in the proverbial closet, I was lonely, depressed and caught between desperately wanting to find other guys like me and hoping that no one would ever find out. I was going crazy

Then everything changed in an instant.

On Tuesday 15 July, Andrew Cunanan, armed with a weapon, marched up to the famous Italian fashion designer Gianni Versace and gunned him down on the steps of his palatial Miami home. He didn't die instantly. He was rushed to the Jackson Memorial Hospital, where the trauma team did everything possible to bring him back from the brink. They failed. At 9.31am he was pronounced dead. The world had lost a genius, and people all around the globe began to pour out their grief

As a bored, closeted, gay teen, Versace's murder, at the hands of a man alleged to be a gay prostitute, suddenly propelled a real life 'gay' drama into my consciousness. I was transfixed. Suddenly I felt strangely connected to a world I didn't really understand. Suddenly there were people like me everywhere, and the world wasn't just talking about Versace and Cunanan but also about the gay scene, its darker side and the glamour of high end living.

So when the BBC recently began running the drama series *The Assassination Of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story*, I found myself, 21 years later, transfixed all over again. Only this time, it took me right back to that dusty summer and all the memories I thought I'd forgotten.

The world's media went into a frenzy that summer. Lurid tales soon filled the void. Had Versace been promiscuous? Did he and his partner, Antonio D'Amico, hook up with and procure groups of men for sex - paid or otherwise? Much is open to speculation - and probably many of the rumours turned out to be true.

The story grew grimmer. It soon

emerged Cunanan had killed four other people before Versace, and one of them was the tycoon Lee Miglin, a real estate developer. He'd murdered Miglin by stabbing him more than 20 times with a screwdriver and sawing open his throat with a hacksaw. Cunanan was a prolific drug taker and consummate liar with an enormous IQ of 147. He had used his looks, charm and the sale of sex to acquire himself sugar daddy after sugar daddy.

Eight days after he killed Versace, he was cornered in a beach houseboat and eventually turned the gun on himself. To this day, his motives remain unclear, as does much of his complicated past, especially as no suicide note was left.

Versace's funeral was beautiful, attended by the wealthy and the glamorous. Princess Diana, who had recently fallen out with Elton John, famously buried their disagreement in Milan Cathedral to comfort the sobbing singer as he showed the world his grief. Over 2,000 people attended. It was a sad day. I cried. Was I crying for Versace, or was I crying because I was alone and desperately wanted to belong? I'm still not sure

July became August, and the Princess of Wales herself was tragically killed in a car crash in the Pont de l'Alma road tunnel in Paris, travelling at great speed to avoid the pursuing paparazzi. The world went into meltdown. The lurid tales of Andrew Cunanan were put aside as another icon was mourned. Gays in their thousands laid flowers on the streets of London and were interviewed on camera. The so-called Queen of Hearts was dead.

A week after that, Mother Teresa was dead, too.

Yet just when I thought that summer couldn't have got any more dramatic or confusing, my pregnant eldest sister, Sarah, then 23, decided to try and commit suicide. She had tried before, only this time it was me who found her. It was me who had to fish out of her mouth the remnants of the concoction of tablets she'd taken in desperation, as a cry for help. She had recently broken up with



her boyfriend, and, emotionally unstable, couldn't cope. Suddenly all the death and drama of the summer was in front of me. I got her to hospital in time to avoid too much damage to her major internal organs or her unborn child. She and the baby survived. Her life got better, albeit temporarily.

The summer of '97 taught me a lesson. No matter how broken your spirit, be it from depression, death, murder or tragedy, life is for living, and I live it every day. My sister eventually died at the age of 36 - the age I am now - not by taking her own life but by a toxic mix of prescription medication that reacted in her body and caused her heart and lungs to double in size and then suddenly collapse. Events like those of '97 make you stop and think. Learn from failure, rise from misfortune and always help a friend in their hour of need. You never know what life will throw at you. Life is precious. Live it and love it, and, above all, simply be you.

CAT'S CORNER

“Naked flamingos”

I bought my partner an anniversary card with a straight couple on it. Okay, they weren't actually a human couple but even so, it felt a bit odd. They were a couple of flamingos but, nonetheless, you could tell they were straight because one flamingo was wearing a bow tie and the other wore a tiara. Now, I'm not David Attenborough, but I'm pretty sure flamingos don't wear bow ties or tiaras, and I suspect that most of us couldn't tell the difference between a Mrs Flamingo and a Mr Flamingo if our lives depended on it. But anniversary cards are littered with couples of animals, baked beans, teddies etc all dressed up to be a 'man' and a 'woman'. But they don't even really look like men and women. I mean, how many couples do you know, straight or gay, where one wears a bow tie and the other a tiara? (Don't answer that - I know the couple you're thinking of, and they're definitely not straight...). I'm not the best at remembering anniversaries, birthdays, Christmas etc in

advance, so card buying tends to be a rushed affair carried out in the closest petrol station or corner shop, so I accept that choice is going to be limited. But it's frustrating that card designers insist that couples have to be falsely portrayed. Not only does it not portray same-sex couples, but it doesn't even portray modern straight couples. Couples these days, gay or straight, generally no longer look significantly different from each other in terms of dress or hair. What would we have - two flamingos wearing jeans with vaguely flicky hair cuts? If I saw two teddy bears cuddling (on the front of a card or in real life), I wouldn't need one to be smoking a pipe and the other to be wearing a tutu to think they were an item - I would just think that they were a cute couple (and that I had had far too much to drink). Surely the vast majority of people - straight, gay or otherwise - don't need these fake indicators of gender to make them realise an anniversary card is depicting a couple. Why can't flamingos just be naked?!

And please can someone tell me when my anniversary is in time for me to get to a decent card shop?!



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ON THE BALL

with
Steve Ball

The new normal

Following the news that Olympic diver Tom Daley and his husband, the filmmaker and screenwriter Dustin Lance Black, are expecting their first child, Daily Mail columnist Richard Littlejohn wrote "Please don't pretend two dads is the new normal". He went on: "Before the usual suspects start bouncing up and down, squealing 'homophobia', don't bother - I'd rather children were fostered by loving gay couples than condemned to rot in state-run institutions, where they face a better-than-average chance of being abused. That said, I still cling to the belief that children benefit most from being brought up by a man and a woman."

I fear that I am one of the 'usual suspects' Littlejohn is referring to. My own

teenager has two dads and it's fairly depressing for her and us that we're still even having this conversation. Being a good parent has nothing to do with whether a child has parents of the same or the opposite sex, and everything to do with the love and support they receive. But what is 'normal' anyway? In my grandparents' generation, it was normal for women who had children out of wedlock to be forced to give them up for adoption. In my parents' generation, it was normal for jobs for women and men to be advertised at different rates. And when I was at school, it was normal for pupils to be physically beaten by their teachers for misbehaving. Fortunately, most of the UK is a more tolerant place than it was only a decade

ago. Even in Northern Ireland, where same-sex marriage still isn't legal, there has been a huge shift in attitudes. I was in Belfast last month to see the Penguins children's theatre show I've produced, and families from all backgrounds were enjoying the story of two male penguins who reared a baby penguin. Not a single complaint from anyone. Time moves on and things change.

This reaction to Tom and Dustin's baby news should be a wakeup call to all of us. It demonstrates just how fragile the equality we've gained really is. Let's not be complacent about the advances we've made, because they're not necessarily permanent. We need to protect and defend our hard-won rights - at home and abroad.



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THE VIRAL ROUND-UP

Here's what we've been looking at online...

We all do it - spend hours on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. Often we're distracted from what we should be doing by cat videos and funny pranks - or by something feelgood that's been shared so much on the net it's officially classed as 'viral'. Well, here are some of Midlands Zone's favourites from the past month!



NAKED CHEFS AND FOOD! TWO OF OUR FAVOURITE THINGS!

Thanks to YouTube channel My Naked Kitchen, cooking has become a whole lot sexier! As you'd expect, there's lots of chopping, peeling and mixing taking place - but with hot, semi-naked (and often naked) guys doing all the hard work!

It's certainly worth checking out - you never know what you might learn!

Visit the channel on YouTube at:
[youtube.com/channel/UCYQKWWtlhr2p_TkRamqITg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYQKWWtlhr2p_TkRamqITg)

CELEB SNAPS!

Our fave celebrity Instagram pics...



Russell Tovey is our new favourite superhero!



X Factor's Seann Miley Moore is rocking the Burberry look!



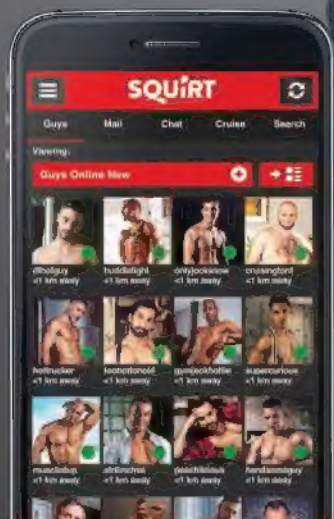
There's a lot of love for Australian Olympian Matthew Mitcham

Kameron Michaels is our favourite new Drag Race queen!



When it comes to RuPaul's Drag Race, we're the show's biggest fans! But we're especially keen on Season 10's Kameron Michaels. Hunky, muscular and covered in tattoos, he's certainly worth a follow on Instagram, even if it's just for the amazing transformation photos. Want to join us in our gawping? Then head on over to [instagram.com/kameron-michaels](https://www.instagram.com/kameron-michaels). You won't regret it!

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